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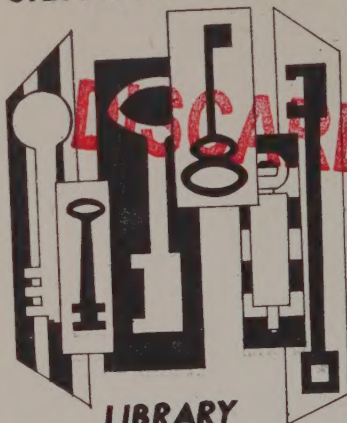
36276

Hell-bent fer heaven;a play in three act



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HELL-BENT FER HEAVEN



Rufe Pryor

HELL-BENT
FER HEAVEN

A Play in Three Acts

BY
HATCHER HUGHES



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HELL-BENT FER HEAVEN

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By Hatcher Hughes
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First Edition

G-Y

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1924

To
B. M.

(Programme of the first New York performance,
Friday, January 4, 1924)

“HELL-BENT FER HEAVEN”

By Hatcher Hughes

Produced under the personal direction of Alonzo Klaw.

(In Order of Their Appearance)

THE CAST

DAVID HUNT.....	AUGUSTIN DUNCAN
MEG HUNT.....	CLARA BLANDICK
SID HUNT.....	GEORGE ABBOTT
RUFÉ PRYOR.....	JOHN F. HAMILTON
MATT HUNT.....	BURKE CLARKE
ANDY LOWRY.....	GLENN ANDERS
JUDE LOWRY.....	MARGARET BOROUGH

THE PLAY STAGED BY AUGUSTIN DUNCAN.

The setting was designed by Alonzo Klaw.

HELL BENT FER HEAVEN

CHARACTERS

(In the order of their appearance)

DAVID HUNT

MEG HUNT

SID HUNT

RUFÉ PRYOR

MATT HUNT

ANDY LOWRY

JUDE LOWRY

SCENE: The Hunt home in the Carolina mountains.

The action takes place between four o'clock in the afternoon and nine o'clock at night on a midsummer day.

HELL BENT FER HEAVEN

ACT I

Interior of MATT HUNT's home in the Carolina mountains. The walls and ceiling are of rough boards, smoked and stained with age. The furniture is old and hand-made.

The place is neat and home-like in the old-fashioned way. At the left, toward the rear, is a rough staircase with crude balustrade. Under the staircase, facing the right wall, is a small door opening into the cellar. To the right of this there is another door leading into the kitchen.

The outside door is in the rear wall and opens directly on a porch covered with flowering shrubs. A "Red Rambler" rose hangs over the doorway on a trellis. There are windows on each side of the door, through which you catch a glimpse of a river valley with mountains in the background. To the left of the door is a gun rack with ancient and modern firearms.

It is late afternoon and the bright sunlight, visible through the doors and windows, is tempered by the lengthening shadows. A bluish vapor hangs over the

river, half concealing the distant peaks of the mountains.

Old DAVID HUNT enters from without. He is a rugged, well-preserved man of eighty. His snow-white hair and beard contrast vividly with the ruddy glow of his face. The peculiar radiance of countenance that comes with serene old age is heightened in him by the brilliant sunlight, which brings into full relief a personality that is rich, humorous, and mellow without a touch of sentimentality. He carries an old muzzle-loading rifle, which he places in the gun rack after removing the percussion cap.

A moment later his daughter-in-law, MEG HUNT, a strong, active woman of forty-odd, enters from the kitchen, carrying an earthenware bowl full of garden peas.

MEG

Whew! I declar—it's hot enough in that kitchen to brile bacon 'thout a fire! [*She sits down and begins to shell peas.*]

DAVID

[*Mops his face*]

It's hot 'nough everywhar to-day.

MEG

I reckon it 'll storm ag'in afore night.

DAVID

If it don't it 'll miss a good chance.

MEG

Whar you been?

DAVID

Up along the river. I thought I might run across that hawk that's been arter your young turkeys.

MEG

Did you see it?

DAVID

[Seats himself and helps her shell peas]

Not close enough to speak to him. But I didn't foller him fur. I thought I'd kinder like to be around when Sid gits home.

MEG

[Glances toward the door uneasily]

Seems quair they hain't come yit. With Matt a-leavin' here at daybreak they'd ought ha' been home two hours ago.

DAVID

Well, it takes time on a day like this. Matt ain't a-goin' to push them colts up the mountain this weather. An' Sid, apt as not, didn't git thar on time. He never

wus a lad to be governed by clocks [*chuckles softly*]
ner nothin' else under the sun 'at I ever hyeard of!

MEG

I wonder what he'll be like now! Mebby the war's
changed him!

DAVID

Mebby so.

MEG

When it fust started I mind they wus lots in the
papers about our soldiers a-goin' into battle a-prayin'
an' readin' their Bibles. Sid allus wus good about
readin' his Bible.

DAVID

[*Chuckles slyly*]

Yeh, 'specially the fightin' parts. [*She starts slightly
and a shadow crosses her face*] But don't you worry
about Sid. He'll settle down. They's plenty o' time
fer that. [*Beaming with unconscious pride*] I use to
be jist like him when I was a lad, an' now look at me.
You don't see me a-tearin' around the country on hoss-
back a-cussin' an' raisin' Ole Ned.

MEG

No; but I wouldn't put it past you if you had the
strength.

DAVID

Hey?

MEG

It's your flesh that's got religion, not your sperit.

DAVID

[Laughs good-naturedly]

I ain't denyin' it, though I reckon you'd like it better if I 'us ashamed o' havin' been young an' strong. You're jist like all women, Meg. When they find a man's got a little sap in him they think he's headed straight fer the devil.

[Horses are heard in the distance. MEG springs up excitedly.]

MEG

Thar! I *know* that's them!

DAVID

It sounds like it—from here. *[Shading his eyes with his hand, he looks up the river, while she peeps over his shoulder.]* It's Matt, all right, but I don't see Sid.

MEG

[Turns away querulously]

Well, it's no more 'n I expected! I've had a feelin' ever sence they took him across that ocean that I'd never see him ag'in!

[SID, *dressed in civilian clothes, with khaki shirt and hat, enters from the kitchen, eating a large piece of pie. He is a handsome and vigorous young fellow, with the unmistakable slouch of the mountaineer.*]

SID

Hello, Mam!

MEG

Sid! [*She hugs him, with tears in her eyes. He laughs and pats her on the back, taking another bite of pie.*] What 'd you sneak in through the kitchen an' skeer me like this fer? I thought you hadn't come!

SID

I didn't sneak. I jist nachelly come around to the place whar the cookin's done. [*Shaking hands with DAVID*] H'lo, Gran'pap! How air you?

DAVID

I can still lick any eighty-year-old man my size in the mountains if I can ketch him.

SID

[*Laughs and turns his attention to MEG again*]

Well, Mam, it seems right nachel to see you ag'in. How you been makin' out?

MEG

I've been jist about as common. I worried lots about you. An' you ain't a-lookin' none too fat. I'll bet you hain't had nothin' fit to eat sence you left home.

SID

Shucks! I'm all right! Better 'n when I went away.

DAVID

You 'pear to me to be about as sassy as ever. I reckon you knowed you 'us a hero?

SID

Yeh, I read about it in the papers.

DAVID

[Makes a face and spits]

The things they've printed about you's enough to make a healthy man spew! I'll bet if the truth 'us knowed you didn't do half as hard fightin' as I done in the Confederate war!

SID

[Grins mischievously]

You didn't have as many notches on your gun when you got back.

DAVID

Mebby I wusn't as big a liar afore I went.

SID

You didn't have to be; you wusn't a-goin' to as big a war.

DAVID

Size ain't everything in a war! They was bigger men in the one I went to!

SID

Well, I dunno. We had Pershin' an' Fotch.

DAVID

[Contemptuously]

Pershin' an' Fotch! Chiggers an' seed-ticks! Knee-high to a gnat 'longside o' Stonewall Jackson an' Robert E. Lee!

MEG

Lord! Sid hain't no more 'n stepped in the house, an' you start fightin' your ole wars all over ag'in!

DAVID

[Chuckles wisely]

She's dis'p'inted in you, Sid. You're too robustious to suit her. She's been hopin' you'd come back sorter peakin' an' pinin' so she could mammy you an' fatten you up.

MEG

[Looks at him quickly with a startled expression]

What ever put that notion in your head?

DAVID

Well, I've noticed that you allus pay more attention to the runts among the pigs an' chickens than you do to the healthy uns.

[RUFÉ appears at the top of the stairs, unobserved by the others. He is thirty, of medium height, with pale face and shifty, uncertain manner.]

MEG

They need more—jist like humans. When the Saviour was on earth he ministered to the halt an' blind an' didn't bother about t'others. What's the use in doin' fer folks like you an' Matt? You've neither of you ever been sick a day in your life.

DAVID

I ain't complainin'. A man cain't have everything in this world. An' as a constancy I'd ruther have a good stomach an' sound sleep as affection from women.

RUFÉ

[Comes downstairs, smiling at DAVID with an expression of great compassion and humility]

I reckon that's a hint that I'm bein' treated too well here.

DAVID

No; I didn't even know you was in hearin' distance, Rufe. I thought you 'us out thar 'tendin' the store.

RUFE

Well, whether you meant it er not, I want you to know 'at I agree with you. I know I don't deserve the blessin's of a home like this an' a woman in it that's as good to me as my own mammy that died when I 'us little! If she'd ha' lived I might ha' been more deservin'.

MEG

Sid, you rickollect Rufe, don't you, that use' to work fer Joe Bedford down on Sandy Fork?

SID

Shore I do. You're the feller that's been a-helpin' Pa while I 'us away. [*He shakes hands cordially. There is a suggestion of constraint in RUFE's manner.*] How's your health?

RUFE

I cain't brag on myself much.

SID

What's the trouble? You're lookin' all right.

RUFÉ

Yeh, I am, on the outside. The thing's in here [*taps himself on the stomach*], whatever it is. I tried to git in the army arter you left, but they wouldn't have me.

DAVID

Fust I ever hyeard of it, Rufe.

MEG

[*With a show of annoyance*]

Well, it's not the fust I've hyeard of it. Rufe don't tell his business to everybody.

DAVID

What post did you go to to git edzamed—if 'tain't no secret?

RUFÉ

I wusn't edzamed by no army doctor. I wus a-goin' to be, but a man down at Pineville looked me over an' said it wusn't no use.

DAVID

Wus he a doctor?

RUFÉ

[*Evasively*]

Not edzackly; but he had worked fer one an' knowed how to edzamine folks.

DAVID

[*Chuckles*]

Oh, I see! Like the man by playin' the fiddle: he'd seed it done! Well, them army doctors wouldn't ha' been so pertickler, jedgin' by some o' the samples I seen that got by 'em.

RUFÉ

I hyeard they let the bars down toward the end. But I'd jist as soon stay out of a fight if I cain't git in tell it's over.

SID

That's the best time to git in.

RUFÉ

[*Looks at him in surprise*]

Didn't you like fightin'? One o' the papers here said as how you took to it like a fish to water.

SID

[*Laughs ironically*]

Shore I did! It 'us pie to me!

DAVID

That's another lie, Sid! [SID *laughs*.]

RUFÉ

Well, I reckon a man can have too much o' anything. But I b'lieve I'd like war if I had the health to stand

up under it. [DAVID *grunts incredulously.*] I dunno why, but my mind seems to run nachelly to fightin'.

DAVID

That's because your legs 'ld run nachelly t'other way.

MEG

[*Annoyed*]

You've never seed 'em run, have you?

DAVID

No; but he comes of a peaceful family. I mind his gran'daddy durin' the Confederate war. He wus so peaceful that he knocked his front teeth out tell he couldn't bite the ends offen the paper cater'ges we used then, so he wouldn't have to go.

RUFF

He didn't b'lieve in fightin' about niggers! He'd ha' fit all right if he'd had as much to fight fer as Sid had!

DAVID

What did Sid fight fer? I'll bet *he* don't know.

SID

Then you got another bet comin'. I fit to lick t'other side!

DAVID

Well, you're the fust un I've seed that knowed, an' I've axed lots of 'em. An' I reckon our men wusn't the only ones. That gang o' Germans that you got a medal fer ketchin' must ha' been kinder hazy in their minds about the needcessity o' fightin'. [*He pats himself significantly on the stomach*] I'll bet they had some sort o' inside trouble—like Rufe.

SID

[*Laughing*]

I know dern well they did!

RUFÉ

How'd you find it out, Sid? You couldn't talk their talk, could you?

SID

No, but I could tell by the way they acted. Soon as each seed t'other we both started to run. But I looked back first. When I seed they wus a-runnin' away, too, I tuk after 'em a-hollerin' an' shootin' like hell had broke loose, an' the whole bunch surrendered!

RUFÉ

An' they give you a medal fer it! Why, I could ha' done that!

DAVID

You might, Rufe, if you'd ha' thought to look back. [He turns to SID] I reckon their army had found out they wus peaceful folks an' put 'em out thar to git ketched. The dam Yankees use' to do that. An' from what I've hyeard o' these here Germans they're jist a bastard breed o' Yankees.

MEG

Whar is your medal, Sid?

SID

I cain't show it to you now. I busted the last button offen my drawers while ago an' I got 'em pinned up with it.

[MATT HUNT, a vigorous mountaineer of forty-five, appears on the doorstep and begins stamping the mud off his boots. He carries a lap robe and a "slicker" across his arm.]

SID

But here comes Pap. He's got sompen I can show you. [To MATT] Ha' you got that package fer Mam?

MATT

[Fumbling under the lap robe]

Yeh, it's here som'ers.

MEG

What is it?

MATT

[*Throwing the package into her lap*]

You'll have to ax Sid. He fetched it.

SID

It's some sort o' female sompen that a French gal asked me to bring you. I dunno what you'd call it.

MEG

[*Turning the package over doubtfully*]

Umn! If all I've hyeard about them gals over thar's so, I dunno's I want it.

DAVID

[*Starts to take it*]

Le' me see it.

MEG

[*Taking it away from him*]

Yeh, I'll bet you'd take it! [*She opens the package gingerly and takes out a beautiful lace brassière.*] La! Did she knit this herself?

SID

I reckon so. She 'us allus a-piddlin' at sompen like that.

MEG

[Holds it up to the light admiringly]

Umn-umph! It's purty enough, but I hain't the least notion what it's fer!

DAVID

Ahem! Does she look anything like her knittin', Sid?

SID

Yeh, some.

MEG

Well, I hope you cain't see through her as easy. *[SID laughs.]* You didn't let her fool you up with her good looks, did you?

SID

Well, I didn't fetch her back with me, like some of 'em done.

DAVID

If you had, I know a gal here that 'ld ha' scratched her eyes out.

[RUFÉ rises nervously and crosses the room. MEG glances at him sympathetically.]

MATT

Whar you goin', Rufe?

RUFÉ

Nowhere. I jist got tired o' settin' in one place.

DAVID

[*Laughs knowingly*]

Rufe allus gits tired o' the place whar he's a-settin' when you start talkin' about Jude Lowry.

MEG

I don't blame him. You talk so much about gals they ain't nothin' new left to say about 'em.

RUFÉ

I reckon they air jist about alike the world over. Wus the French uns after you all the time, Sid, same as them here?

SID

I cain't say 'at I 'us bothered by 'em much.

DAVID

I'll bet you wusn't lonesome. An' you won't be here. They're lots bolder 'n they wus when you left. They's times now when I don't feel safe myself. If I 'us your age I'd marry Jude Lowry er some other gal fer perfection. Give me a woman every time to fight a woman. [*At mention of JUDE LOWRY, RUFÉ gets up again and moves toward the door aimlessly.*]

MATT

Air you jist changin' your settin' place ag'in, Rufe, er air you goin' out to the store?

MEG

[*With a sudden flare of temper*]

What difference does it make to you which he's a-doin'?

MATT

None in pertickler. Only I thought if he 'us a-goin' out thar he could fetch Sid's pack in when he come back.

RUFÉ

[*With an expression of martyrdom*]

All right, Matt, I'll fetch it. O' course what you hired me fer wus to tend the store. But I'll be a nigger fer Sid—er anything else you ax me!

MATT

[*Rises angrily*]

What's that you're a-bellyachin' about now?

RUFÉ

I ain't a——

MATT

[*Storming impatiently*]

Air you a-goin' to git that pack er not?

RUFÉ

Why, I jist told you I wus!

MEG

Didn't you hear him say it? They ain't no need in bawlin' at him like that! He's got feelin's, like the rest of us!

SID

Hold on, Paw. I don't want to be the cause o' no fracas. I've toted that ole pack all over the world an' 'tain't a-goin' to hurt me to fetch it this much further.

MATT

No, you stay whar you air! He's got out of enough work here!

RUFÉ

I ain't a-tryin' to git out o' nothin'! I'm a-tryin' hard to do anything you ax me, no matter what it is!
[*He goes out.*]

MATT

I never knowed nobody to git me r'iled up like he does.
[*To SID*] That's the kind o' help I've had while you 'us away.

SID

Yeh, I've seed folks like him—kinder tetchy.

MEG

It's enough to make him tetchy, with your paw an' granpaw a-pickin' on him all the time jist 'cause he ain't as big an' strong as they air.

DAVID

You don't ketch me an' Matt a-pickin' on chil'en jist 'cause they ain't as big an' strong as we air. I've noticed when folks gits picked on it's gene'ly 'cause they deserve it.

MEG

You could git along 'ith Rufe if you tried.

MATT

Yeh, I expect we could if we laid awake nights figgerin' how to keep from hurtin' his feelin's—like you do. 'Tain't only he's tetchy—though God knows I'm sick o' hearin' him bellyache—but he's lazy er born tired, I dunno which. Why, he ain't wuth his salt!

DAVID

'Specially sence he got that camp-meetin' brand o' religion. I've never seed a man so hell-bent fer heaven as he is!

RUFÉ

[Enters with the pack and sets it down]

Thar 'tis, Sid.

SID

Much obliged, Rufe.

[*He takes the pack and opens it.*]

RUFÉ

No 'casion. I'm glad to do anything I can to please Matt.

MATT

Well, I got jist one thing more fer you to do. I want you to pack up your duds an' make tracks away from here.

[*RUFÉ is dumfounded. He looks at MEG appealingly.*]

MEG

Matt! You ain't a-goin' to turn him off at this time o' year?

MATT

Course I am. I didn't adopt him fer life when I hired him. I told him he could stay tell Sid come back.

MEG

But he cain't git another clerkin' job. An' it's too late to start a crap now.

MATT

He'd orter thought o' that afore. He's knowed fer a month that Sid wus comin' home.

RUFÉ

He's right, Meg. I might ha' knowed this 'ld happen. [*He goes toward MATT with a malicious expression*] But I'm a-goin' to tell you sompen fer your own good, Matt. God so loved the world that he give His only begotten Son to die so 'at everybody 'at wanted to might be saved. But you've never took advantage o' His offer. I cain't understand that in a close trader like you, Matt. If the offer o' free salvation 'us a box o' free terbacker fer the store you'd never let it git by. [*MATT makes an angry move. RUFÉ backs away.*] Understand, I'm a-sayin' this in a true Christian sperit—fer your own good. The Scripture says to love our enemies an' do good to them that despitefully uses us.

MATT

Dadburn you, I don't want you a-lovin' me, ner doin' good to me, nuther!

RUFÉ

I know you don't, Matt. But I cain't help it—an' you cain't, neither! That's one thing you ain't the boss of!

MATT

[*Menacingly*]

Go on up an' pack your duds an' git out o' here!

RUFÉ

[*Backing away toward the stairs*]

All right, Matt. You're the boss o' that. You can hector me an' bully me about the things o' this world, but you cain't keep me from lovin' your immortal soul. An' you cain't take away my reward which is in heaven. An' you cain't escape yourn—which ain't!

[*He disappears upstairs. MATT glares after him, his right arm trembling significantly.*]

MEG

It's the truth that hurts, Matt. Your reward *ain't* in heaven.

MATT

[*Raging inwardly*]

I wish he'd go thar er *som'ers* an' git hisn!

DAVID

I cain't make him out. If he 'us jist a plain hypocrite I'd know how to take him. But he 'pears to honestly b'lieve everybody's got to be like him afore they're saved.

MEG

Mebby they *has* got to be different from you an' Matt.

SID

Pap, if you don't want him in the store, does it happen to be so's you could let him finish out the summer at the sawmill?

DAVID

Shucks, Sid! Don't waste no worry on him. They ain't money enough in the county to hire him to stay at a sawmill a week.

MATT

No, it's too much like work. If he wants a job let him go to them city folks that's a-puttin' in that dam out here. They'll take anything that comes along. An' he'd mix in fine with them furriners.

MEG

You know he ain't strong enough fer that sort o' work.

SID

This is your business, Paw, an' I reckon you can 'tend to it 'thout any help from me. But I wisht you could see your way to keep him awhile longer.

MATT

What fer?

SID

Well, I got some private affairs to look after.

MEG

An' you'd orter have a chance to rest up, too.

SID

Yeh, I *would* kinder like to spree around a little fer a change.

MATT

Well, if you want some time to yourself, I've stood Rufe two years. I reckon I can stand him another month. But I dunno what sort o' private affairs you've got to look after.

SID

If I told you they wouldn't be private. [*He glances at DAVID with a humorous twinkle*] Fer one thing, I need time to think up some tales to tell about how I won the war.

DAVID

I reckon you've got enough thought up already.

SID

I admit I got the makin's o' some good-sized uns. But I want to try 'em out on you an' git 'em to runnin' slick afore I swear to 'em. [*He takes a large bottle from the pack and gives it to DAVID*] Here, Gran'pap! Any time you git in a fight an' want to ketch t'other feller, jist take a swaller o' that.

MEG

[Disapprovingly]

What is it—licker?

SID

It's one breed of it. The French call it cone-yack.

DAVID

[Sniffs the cork]

It smells like it might be that.

MEG

Wus licker the best thing you could think of to bring your gran'pa?

DAVID

[Laughing]

She's afeard you're a-startin' me on my downward career, son. An' you may be. I knowed a man once that started when he wus about my age—an' he drunk hisself to death when he 'us a hundred an' two!

MEG

Well, jist the same, he might ha' thought o' sompen better to bring you. *[Looking through the things in the pack]* Whar's the Bible I give you? Didn't you find room to fetch that?

SID

Somebody stole it.

MEG

Not your Bible?

SID

Yeh. They'll steal anything, in the army.

MEG

Why, I never hyeard o' sich a thing! An' you went through the whole war like a heathen, 'thout so much as a Testyment?

DAVID

The Baptis' preacher here said they 'us men over thar a-givin' 'em away to anybody 'at wanted 'em.

SID

Yeh, but they never got up whar we wus till after the fightin' 'us over. An' I didn't need one so bad then.

VOICE

[Outside in the distance]

Hello!

MEG

That's Andy 'ith the mail!

SID

[Goes to the door and waves to him]

H'lo, Andy!

ANDY

Well, I'll be derved! Is that you, Sid?

SID

A piece of me. Whyn't you come on in an' swop lies?

ANDY

I'm skeered you'll want too much boot, jedgin' by the size o' them they've been printin' about you.

SID

Don't let that worry you none.

[ANDY, a healthy young fellow, comes in. His face is slightly flushed with whisky, but he is not drunk.]

ANDY

[Shakes hands cordially]

You look healthy as a hell-cat!

SID

Yeh, I can still eat—an' drink some too when I can git it.

ANDY

Don't let not gittin' it bother you. That's all talk. I reckon you're derved glad you went over?

SID

I am now. But they 'us once er twice while I 'us thar I'd jist as soon ha' been back.

ANDY

You're lucky. They hain't been no time I wusn't sorry I didn't go.

SID

What 'us the trouble? Wouldn't they have you?

ANDY

Have me, hell! They'd ha' jumped at me! But Mam an' Paw wheedled me into claimin' edzemption so's I could help cut that patch o' timber up the river fer the gov'ment. An' now I'm totin' the mail.

SID

Well, don't be so down-hearted. Somebody's got to tote it.

ANDY

But, dam' it all, I want a job that gives me more elbow room! Every time I look at that piddlin' mail sack an' think o' what you've been through, I git so goddern mad at myself an' everybody else 'at I feel like startin' a war o' my own right here in the mountains!

[While ANDY is talking, RUFÉ comes downstairs with a small bag in his hand. At ANDY's suggestion of starting a war of his own he stops suddenly and stands as if rooted to the spot. MEG also moves uneasily and exchanges significant glances with MATT and DAVID.]

DAVID

Why don't you? Rufe here says he's sp'ilin' fer a fight!

ANDY

Rufe! Good Lord! If he 'us in hell he wouldn't fight fire!

RUFÉ

Thank God, I'm not headed to'ard hell, like some folks!

ANDY

I know you claimed edzemption when you j'ined the church. Well, every man to his likin'. But hereafter I'm a-goin' to take what's comin' to me in this world *an'* the next! An' that 'minds me, afore I fergit it: have you got any forty-five ammynition in the store?

RUFÉ

Ax Matt. I ain't a-workin' here no longer.

ANDY

What's the matter? Lost your job?

SID

That's all fixed up, Rufe. I won't be workin' much fer a while an' Paw says you can stay another month.

MATT

[Looks at RUFÉ questioningly]

That is, if he wants to stay bad 'nough to tend to his business?

RUFÉ

They ain't no use axin' me if I want to stay. I got nowhere else to go. As fer 'tendin' to my business, I'll do what I've allus tried to do, render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's an' unto God the things that are God's!

SID

Then that's settled. I dunno whose department the ammynition belongs to. But go ahead an' git them caterdges fer Andy an' I'll come out an' beat you both shootin' 'ith this popgun here. *[He takes a German pistol out of the pack.]*

ANDY

[Looks at the pistol]

You don't call that thing a gun, do you?

SID

No, it's a Dutch peace-pipe.

DAVID

I don't believe I ever seed any like that. How does it work?

SID

[Hands him the pistol]

It's automatic. You pull the trigger and it goes right on spittin' like a man chawin' terbacker.

DAVID

[Passing the pistol on to MATT]

Huh! I wouldn't be ketched dead in the woods with it.

SID

Why not?

DAVID

Because it's a insult to shootin'-men, that's why! It's built on the notion that you're a-goin' to miss all your fust shots!

ANDY

How'd you git aholt of it, Sid?

SID

I smoked a Dutchman outen it by provin' to him that I 'us a peacefuller man 'n he wus.

ANDY

Does it shoot any better 'n ourn?

SID

That's what I want to find out.

ANDY

Hell! Hain't you tried it yit?

SID

Not from the hind end. The feller I got it from missed me the first shot.

MEG

[*Eagerly, with a slight catch in her voice*]

Did he surrender, Sid—an' give it to you—after he'd shot at you?

SID

N—no, not edzactly. [*Quietly*] But he didn't have no further use fer it, so I stuck it in my pocket an' fetched it along.

MEG

[*With a sudden revulsion of feeling*]

Thou shalt not kill!

ANDY

Ner git killed if you can help it! [*He starts toward the door.*] Come on, Sid! We'll soon find out whether this thing hits whar you hold her er not!

MEG

[*With intense emotion*]

No! Sid ain't a-goin'!

SID

[Looks at her, puzzled]

Why, Mam! What sort of a graveyard rabbit has crossed your path? Me an' Andy use' to have shootin' matches 'thout you makin' no fuss about it!

MEG

I don't keer! I've seed enough shootin' an' fightin' in my time! An' I've hyeard enough talk about war!

SID

'Tain't a-goin' to do no harm fer us to shoot at a spot on a tree!

MEG

'Tain't a-goin' to do no good! [*With a sudden flare of passion*] An' I wisht you'd throw that pistol in the river! The man it belonged to had a mammy, too! Think how she feels—wherever she is!

ANDY

If he had been to as many shootin' matches as Sid, mebby you'd be the one that's a-feelin' that way!

RUFÉ

It wusn't the shootin' matches that saved Sid. It 'us the will o' God.

SID

Mebby so, Rufe. But I've noticed, other things bein' ekal, God generally sides 'ith the feller that shoots the straightest.

MEG

Oh! Cain't you talk o' nothin' but shootin' an' killin'? I wish I could go some place where I'd never hear guns mentioned ag'in as long as I live!

RUFÉ

You can! We can all go thar if we live right! [*He hesitates and looks at MATT out of the corner of his eye*] An' that 'minds me, boys: if I 'us you I wouldn't have no more shootin' matches. It 'us at a shootin' match that the feud fust started 'twixt your two gran'-daddies. [*In an instant the faces of the men become tense with amazement. RUFÉ is conscious of this, but continues with a show of innocence*] An' they 'us both fetched home on stretchers, 'long 'ith lots more o' your kin on both sides, afore it 'us patched up. I know 'tain't none o' my business——

MATT

[*His right fist trembling dangerously*]

Then why the hell don't you keep your mouth shut?

RUFÉ

[Cowering in fear]

I 'us only warnin' 'em fer their own good! They're frien'ly now an' I want 'em to stay that way!

MATT

You've got a dam' poor way o' showin' it! You know that's sompen we don't talk about here! If I didn't know you 'us a born fool I'd——

MEG

He meant everything fer the best, Matt!

MATT

That's what you allus say.

RUFÉ

All right, if you don't want me to do you a good turn, I won't. Hereafter they can shoot er do what they please, I won't open my mouth!

SID

You needn't pester your mind about me an' Andy, Rufe. We've knowed all about the war 'twixt our fam'lies sence we 'us knee-high. An' it's never made our trigger fingers itch none. Has it, Andy?

ANDY

Not a durned bit! We nachelly hain't talked about it, but I reckon we could if we had to.

SID

I don't reckon nothin' about it; I know it! Me an' you could talk about anything 'thout fightin'—'cept religion!

ANDY

Ha, ha, ha! I'd even take a crack at that with you, fer I expect we've got about the same sort!

SID

Well, my mouth ain't no prayer-book an' I don't try to make it sound like one.

ANDY

Me nother! You cain't make a sheep outen a wild cat by tyin' a bunch o' wool to its tail.

DAVID

You two young jackasses think you're mighty smart a-runnin' down religion! But I want to tell you sompen: I've lived in this ole world longer 'n both of you put together, an' they ain't nothin' to be ashamed of in bein' a Christian!

RUFÉ

I'm glad to know you feel that way about it!

DAVID

Hey! What's that you said?

ANDY

[Slyly, with an amused twinkle]

You hyeard what he said. He's a-hintin' that he didn't know, from the way you behaved, that you *wus* a Christian.

[DAVID grips his stick and glares at RUF.]

DAVID

He won't *say* that, not to my face! If he does, dad-burn him, I'll show him whether I'm a Christian or not!

SID

[Laughs]

What 'll you do, turn t'other cheek?

DAVID

I might—once! Consoun you, I b'lieve you agree with him! You an' Andy are so puffed up 'ith pride an' wind that you think nobody but women an' runts ever gits religion! But I'm here to tell you that I seed a preacher once right down thar in the Baptis' church that could pick you both up by the scruff o' the neck an' shake you down to your nachel size!

MATT

An' he didn't 'pologize fer havin' religion, nuther!

DAVID

No, sir-ee, not by a jugful! The fust day big meetin' started he picked out the wust sinner they wus in the congregation an' p'inted his finger at his nose an' told him right out in meetin' that he 'us a-goin' jist as straight to hell as if he 'us shot out of his own gun!

SID

An' d'you mean to say, Gran'pap, that you set thar an' took it all 'thout a word?

DAVID

Who told you it 'us me?

SID

[*Laughing*]

Nobody, but I 'lowed it wus.

DAVID

Well, you 'lowed right! But I didn't set thar an' take it. No, I 'us jist as much of a jackass as you an' Andy. I riz up an' walked out on the platform where he 'us a-standin' an' sez to him, sez I, "You're a mighty big preacher! I can see that by lookin' at you. But what I want to find out is whether your religion's in

proportion to your size!" An' 'ith that I hauled away 'ith the flat o' my hand an' smacked him like all possessed on the right cheek! [*He pauses dramatically.*]

ANDY

Well, wus his religion fool-proof?

DAVID

I'm a-comin' to that. I seed him grit his teeth an' trimble from top to toe jist like a steam engine in britches! But he ketched hisself in time an' turned t'other cheek! [*He pauses again.*]

SID

An' what 'd you do then?

DAVID

I done jist what you er any other young jackass 'ld ha' done 'ith Satan aggin' him on: I smit him ag'in!

SID

Ha, ha, ha! I reckon he turned ag'in?

DAVID

I jedge not, fer when I come to they wus two men a-rubbin' me, an' he us a-goin' right on preachin' an' explainin' Scripture as cool as if nothin' had happened! He said the Saviour never told us what

to do after we'd turned t'other cheek once, for he took it fer granted any durn fool 'ld know! [*Rufe shifts uneasily and starts to say something, but David glares at him and he subsides.*] An' 'ith that fer a text he whirled in an' preached the best sermon I ever hyeard on the person o' Christ! He said the reason so many folks thought Christ 'us a weak an' womanish sort of a man 'us because they 'us runts theirselves an' wanted Him to keep 'em in countenance. Then he took the Scripture, passage an' verse, an' proved jist the sort o' man Christ wus! Now I'll bet every one of you here thinks he used speritual power when he drove the thieves out o' the temple! [*He looks around at them triumphantly.*] But, 'ey ganny, he didn't!

RUFÉ

How do *you* know he didn't?

DAVID

B'cause he didn't have to, that's how! I never seed a man yit appeal fer speritual power when he could do it hisself!

RUFÉ

An' did he turn the water into wine the same way?

DAVID

No, that 'us a merricle. But if he'd ha' been a weak, water-drinkin' man it stands to reason he wouldn't ha'

turned water into wine! You'd know that if you'd read your Bible the way you'd orter, 'stid nosin' aroun' in it fer the texts that suit you.

RUFÉ

I've read it from kiver to kiver! I know it back-ards.

DAVID

That's the only way you do know it! You'd have to have the right sort o' religion to read it for'ards!

RUFÉ

They's only one right sort! That's the sort Jesus had! An', thanks to Him, I got that!

DAVID

Shucks! Jesus wouldn't know your religion if he met it in the road! *He* didn't wait till the war broke out an' skeered Him afore He got His! He wa'n't that sort! I did have hopes that Sid might start preachin' the real Jesus religion when he got back, but's fur as I can make out he's like these here piddlin' 'Piscopalians that run that mission school over thar. He ain't got no sort at all! An' as fer the sort o' religion most folks has got around here, it's a stench in the nostrils o' God!

RUFÉ

You needn't look so straight at me! I know who you're a-hittin' at!

DAVID

I wusn't a-hittin' at nobody in pertickler! But I've allus hyeard you could tell who's hit by who hollers.

RUFÉ

I'm satisfied 'ith my religion!

DAVID

That's a shore sign God ain't.

MEG

La! I'd jist as soon hear you talk about war as religion!

DAVID

It allus has been a peacefuler subjec'.

MEG

Cain't you think o' nothing else? David, I thought you said you 'us a-goin' to rob a bee-gum fer Sid afore supper!

DAVID

That's so! I'd 'most fergot. I'll see if I can git 'nough fer him to mess up his mouth with. It's rained

so much the past month the bees ain't had no time to work. Matt, want to hold the smudge fer me?

MATT

Yeh. [*Rises and crosses to the outer door.*] Hold on! Some one else 'll have to help you, Paw. I better round up that hay. Looks like a shower afore long. [*He goes out.*]

DAVID

Yeh, kinder feels like it. Come along, Meg; you can hold the smudge.

MEG

[*Looks at SID and ANDY significantly*]

I'd orter be startin' supper. I reckon Sid can help you.

DAVID

Sid! He ain't no hand 'ith bees, an' you know it! Look here, Meg, if he covered hisself up from head to toe he wouldn't be as safe as he is right here 'ith Andy. So come on an' stop your frettin'!

[*He goes out through the kitchen, followed by MEG.*]

ANDY

[*Getting ready to go*]

I reckon I'd better be tappin' the sand. Sid, awhile ago you seemed to be worried 'bout where you'd git your next drink.

SID

I ain't losin' no sleep over it.

ANDY

Well, I got a bottle o' blockade out here in the mail pouch, if you——

RUFÉ

[*Eagerly*]

Where'd you git it, Andy?

ANDY

That's my business.

RUFÉ

I've hyeard that new stuff they're makin' now's so fiery that it 'll burn your insides out. [*He looks around and lowers his voice confidentially*] You ought to see some I got.

ANDY

You! I thought you'd gone prohybition!

RUFÉ

This is some I had afore I j'ined the church. It's over twenty year old.

ANDY

Oh, hell!

RUFÉ

I swear it on a stack o' Bibles!

SID

If you had it afore you j'ined the church, how'd it ever live to be twenty year old?

ANDY

That's what I'd like to know!

RUFÉ

Well, I allus did have a weak stummick, you know that. An' it's been lots wuss the past few years. Any sort o' licker's apt to gag me!

ANDY

That don't count fer no twenty years!

RUFÉ

I ain't claimin' I had it in my possession all that time. D'you mind that tale 'bout the revenue raid way back yonder, when Bob Fortenbury buried all his licker in the bed o' Buck Spring Creek an' never could find it 'cause it come a rain an' washed his marks away?

ANDY

Yeh?

RUFÉ

Well, me an' Bill Hedgpeth unkivered a ten-gallon keg one day 'bout three year ago when we 'us dynamitin' fish. [*Enthusiastically*] An' it's the best stuff you ever stuck your tongue into! So thick an' sirupy it clings to the sides o' the bottle jist like 'lasses!

ANDY

[*Interrupting him*]

Stop! Is they any left?

RUFÉ

Some. Why?

ANDY

Why! Ha, ha! Did you hear that, Sid? He wants to know why? 'Course you don't want to sell it?

RUFÉ

Well, my advice to everybody is to let licker alone. But if folks is bound they're a-goin' to drink the stuff, I s'pose tain't no more 'n right to help 'em git sompen good.

ANDY

[*Slaps him on the back*]

Spoke like a true Christian!

RUFÉ

That's what I try to be, Andy. An' ef that lick'er o' mine 'll help you out I don't want to make nuthin' on it. The only thing is—I bought Bill Hedgpeth's share, an' if I'm a-goin' to be out of a job soon I *would* kinder like to git back jist what I paid fer it.

ANDY

Well, you won't have no trouble a-squarin' yourself if it tastes anything like you say.

RUFÉ

You don't have to take my word for it. I got a sample bottle. [*He makes a move toward the stairs.*] Come on up an' try it!

ANDY

[*Hesitating*]

I've had about all I can tote. But I reckon one more drink like that won't load me down. [*As he turns to follow RUFÉ he hears a noise outside and looks off in the direction of the store.*] Oh, hell! Thar's Sis—out at the store!

SID

What's the trouble?

ANDY

Trouble! Jude's got religion sence you left—like Rufe! An' she has a jeeminy fit every time she smells

licker on me! But drive on, Rufe! Dam' it all, I'm free, white, an' twenty-one!

[*He goes upstairs. RUFÉ hangs back. SID goes to the door and looks out.*]

RUFÉ

[*Insinuatingly*]

I meant fer you to sample it too, Sid!

SID

[*Intent on the door*]

Much obliged. You an' Andy go ahead. I'll go out an' see what Jude wants.

RUFÉ

[*With venom behind the jest*]

I know what's the matter 'ith you! Now 'at you know Jude's got religion, you want her to think you're sproutin' wings!

SID

[*Surprised, turns and looks at him*]

Have you staked out any grounds fer objectin' to what she thinks about me?

RUFÉ

Why, Sid, you didn't take me serious, did you? She's all free country as fur as I'm concerned! I wus only jokin'!

SID

Oh, I see! Well, whichever way it is, you got some business o' your *own* upstairs an' you better go along an' 'tend to it—without me.

[RUFÉ makes a move as if to reply, but changes his mind and goes upstairs, throwing a malignant glance over his shoulder at SID. JUDE, a handsome mountain girl, is seen approaching. SID smiles mischievously and steps back into the corner behind the door. JUDE enters and looks about her.]

JUDE

[Calls through the open door into the kitchen]
Miz Hunt!

SID

[Steps out, smiling]
Ahem!

JUDE

[Startled, looks at him in amazement]

Sid! [She takes a step toward him. SID presses his lips together firmly and assumes a pose of martyrdom.] What's the matter? [She comes nearer, eagerly.] Cain't you talk? [SID stands rigidly at attention and shakes his head solemnly.] Oh! You hain't been shell-shocked ner tetched in the head? [SID shakes his head again solemnly as before.] Then why don't you say sompen? [She takes hold of his arms, with increas-

ing alarm.] You know me, don't you? [SID seizes her suddenly and kisses her. After a moment she frees herself and looks at him again with amazement. He clicks his heels together and assumes his martyr's pose, but his mouth twitches with the ghost of a smile.] Sid, if you don't tell me why you're actin' this way I'm a-goin' to scream!

SID

I ain't actin'! This is nachel!

JUDE

Nachel?

SID

Yeh. Don't you mind the last time you seen me you told me never to speak to you ag'in as long as I lived?

JUDE

Oh! So that's it!

SID

[Laughs guiltily]

Yeh! You know I allus did try to please you!

JUDE

[Backs away from him angrily]

If you didn't aim to speak to me, what'd you go an' kiss me fer?

SID

You didn't say nothin' about not kissin' you.

JUDE

I never kick afore I'm spurred! You knowed all the time I didn't mean it when I told you never to speak to me no more. An', anyhow, you could ha' writ!

SID

I thought o' writin'. But I ain't much of a hand at settin' things down on paper. I 'lowed I could argy with you better when I got you where I could sorter surround you!

JUDE

That's another thing! You'd ought to kep' your hands offen me! [*With a suggestion of coquetry*] I still ain't a-goin' to marry you!

SID

Oh! [*He turns away teasingly.*] Well, nobody axed you.

JUDE

[*Her eyes blazing dangerously*]

You needn't throw that up to me!

SID

Oh, come on, Jude, le's be sensible. [*He tries to take her hands.*] I'll quarrel with you an' court you all you want me to after we're married.

JUDE

You act like you had a morgidge on me!
[*During the preceding two speeches ANDY and RUFÉ are seen coming downstairs. ANDY is in the state of exhilaration that precedes complete intoxication. At SID's suggestion of marriage, RUFÉ halts on the stairs and looks at him with a malignant expression.*]

ANDY

[*Thickly, with a drunken flourish*]
Hello, Sis!

JUDE

Andy! You're drunk ag'in!

ANDY

Well! What 're you a-goin' to do about it, little Sis? Pray? [*She hangs her head in shame and doesn't answer. He continues, belligerently*] I'm free, white, an' twenty-one! An' it's a free country! Come on, Rufe! [*To SID, confidentially*] Me an' Rufe's got some tradin' to do! [*He winks elaborately.*] Ss-sh!

[*He starts out, JUDE makes a move to follow him.*]
Wait! Steady! Where *you* goin'?

JUDE

To the store. I got some tradin' to do, too!

ANDY

Aw right. Then let Sid wait on you! Me an' Rufe 'll stay right here till you come back! Our business is private!

RUFE

[*Eagerly*]

I expect you'd better let me go with her, Andy. I know where the things are better 'n Sid.

ANDY

No! I object! You stay right dam' where you are! [To JUDE] Now—go ahead! An', Sid, don't fergit my caterdges!

SID

I reckon we'll have to call that shootin' match off, Andy. Mam's kickin' up sich a row about it.

ANDY

Ha, ha, ha! She's afeard we'll start another war! All right, it's off! But bring me a box o' caterdges jist the same as if it wusn't.

SID

[In a lower tone to JUDE]

Come on! Don't cross him! *[Then to ANDY]* What sort o' caterdges, Andy?

ANDY

The sort that raises the most hell!

SID

Ha, ha! All right. But that don't tell me much. You can grow a purty good crop o' hell 'ith any sort if you'll water 'em 'ith enough lickier! *[He and JUDE go out front.]*

ANDY

[Looks after him drunkenly]

Does *he* think I'm drunk, too?

RUFÉ

I dunno what he thinks! *[Insinuatingly]* But did you hear what he 'us a-sayin' to Jude jist now?

ANDY

To Jude? *[He draws himself up stiffly.]* Wus it anything ouden th' way?

RUFÉ

I'd think so. He wus a-talkin' about marryin' her. *[ANDY relaxes, with an expression of boredom.]* But

mebby you don't object to the Hunts an' Lowries a-swoppin' blood *that way* instid o' the way they use' to!

ANDY

[*Starts violently and lays his hand on his pistol*]

Swoppin' blood! Wus Sid a-talkin' about the Hunts an' Lowries a-swoppin' blood like they use' to?

RUFÉ

'Tain't like you to be skeered of him, Andy!

ANDY

Umn? Wha's 'at? [*He lurches toward RUFÉ drunkenly and seizes him by the collar.*] Any man 'at says I'm afraid o' Sid Hunt's a God-dam' liar!

RUFÉ

I didn't say it! [*ANDY relaxes his grip and grunts interrogatively. RUFÉ continues, glancing suggestively in the direction that SID has gone*] But I know the man that did.

ANDY

Umn? You know the man 'at said I— Who is he?

RUFÉ

I ain't tellin' no tales, but he don't live more 'n a thousand miles from here!

ANDY

Wus it Sid hisself?

RUFÉ

I ain't a-sayin' who it wus. But as your friend, Andy, I'm a-goin' to warn you o' one thing: don't you start nothin' 'ith Sid that you ain't prepared to end! Rickollect the last time the Hunts an' Lowries fit they 'us three more Lowries killed 'n they wus Hunts!

ANDY

[*With the superhuman calm of the drunken man*]

Did Sid brag about that?

RUFÉ

I ain't a-sayin' what Sid done! I'm a-talkin' to you now as a friend fer your own good!

ANDY

Three more Lowries 'n Hunts! [*Weeping with rage*]
The God-dam' bastard! Where is he? Where is he?
[*He starts outside. RUFÉ restrains him.*]

RUFÉ

Ca'm yourself, Andy! He'll be back here any minute!

ANDY

Rufe, are you fer me er ag'in' me?

RUFÉ

I'll stick by a friend, Andy, till Jedgment Day!

ANDY

Then gimme your hand! Fer jist as shore as sunrise I'm a-goin' to ekalize things!

RUFÉ

I'm sorry to hear you talk this way, Andy!

ANDY

[Opens his pistol and examines it]

You b'lieve in Provydence, don't you, Rufe?

RUFÉ

I don't believe nothin' 'bout it. I know it!

ANDY

Look! *[He shows him the pistol.]* It's a-goin' to take six Hunts to make things ekal an' I got jist six caterdges left! That's Provydence!

RUFÉ

[Not understanding him]

My advice to you, Andy, is to drop this! The Hunts are dangerous folks! Sid in pertickler, now 'at he's been through the war! You'd a heap better pocket

your pride an' live in peace with him if you can, fer if he gits started he won't stop at *nothin'*! I know him!

ANDY

But you don't know me, Rufe! You think I'm skeered! Well, jist wait! This is a free country an' everybody in it ought to be ekal! Three more Lowries 'n Hunts—that ain't ekal!

[*He breaks down and weeps with rage as the curtain falls.*]

ACT II

The same scene, a few minutes later. ANDY sits staring blankly at the door with an expression of tragic determination. RUFÉ goes to the window and looks eagerly in the direction of the store.

ANDY

[Sits up stiffly]

Is he comin'?

RUFÉ

[Comes over fearfully and lays his hand on ANDY'S shoulder]

Andy, is they still evil in your heart in spite o' what I've said to you?

ANDY

[Between a sob and a laugh]

Ha! ha! Brother, let us pray! *[He clasps his hands over his pistol and prays in the fashion of a minister with a hymn-book]* O Lord, look down on this poor sinner an' make him love his enemies an' do good to 'em! *[He bursts into unholy laughter]* Ha, ha, ha! I'll do good to him, all right!

RUFÉ

You ain't a-goin' to kill him *now*!

ANDY

Every man has to die when his time comes!

[SID and JUDE are seen coming toward the house.

ANDY watches them with the unnatural calm of the drunken man. RUFÉ, frightened, slinks away toward the kitchen door as they enter.]

JUDE

[*Tactfully*]

Andy, I'm ready to go home now if you are.

ANDY

You know the way, an' the road's open!

JUDE

But I don't want to go by myself.

ANDY

I got some business to settle 'ith Sid!

JUDE

Well, I can wait fer you. I want to see Miz Hunt, anyhow. [*She goes into the kitchen.*]

SID

Here's your caterdges, Andy.

ANDY

[Fumbles in his pocket for his purse]

An' here's your money!

SID

That's all right. I charged 'em.

ANDY

'Tain't all right! Not by a dam' sight!

SID

[Humoring him]

Well, Andy, jist as you say. *[He takes the money and gives him the cartridges.]* I'll scratch 'em off the book the next time I go out there.

ANDY

Rufe 'll scratch 'em off! Don't fergit that, Rufe! *[He looks at SID with deadly calm.]* I don't want no Hunt—in hell ner out—to say 'at I killed him on a credit!

SID

[Turns on him squarely, uncertain whether he is joking or not]

The Hunts hain't never accused you o' not payin' your debts, Andy!

ANDY

They've had room to! I've owed 'em a passel o' lead ever sence I 'us born! An' I'm a-goin' to pay it now!

SID

What's the trouble with him, Rufe? He seems to have sompen on his mind.

RUFEE

I don't know! He's been a-talkin' plumb wild! I tried to ca'm him, but I couldn't!

ANDY

You keep out o' this, Rufe! [*To SID, with the same deadly calm*] Sid Hunt, this is a free country, ain't it?

SID

That's what they call it, Andy!

ANDY

If it's a free country, then everybody in it ought to be ekal!

SID

Well, ain't they? Some's had more to drink 'n others, but that's nothin' to quarrel about.

ANDY

I admit it, but that ain't the p'int. When the Hunts an' Lowries fought the last time the Hunts killed three more Lowries 'n the Lowries killed Hunts! Do you call that ekal?

SID

That's all over now, Andy!

ANDY

But it ain't ekal—is it?

SID

Why, Andy, that happened so long ago—afore me an' you 'us born!

ANDY

That ain't the p'int. It ain't ekal!

SID

All right, then, it ain't. But what do you want me to do to equalize things?

ANDY

I don't want you to do a dam' thing but holler! I'll do the ekalizin'! An' they's only one way! The Hunts killed three more Lowries 'n the Lowries killed Hunts! I'm a-goin' to kill three more Hunts 'n the Hunts killed Lowries!

SID

[Trying to appear calm]

Three more. That sounds reasonable enough. Now lemme see, how many Hunts 'ill that make in all?

ANDY

Only six! An' I got jist six caterdges in my pistol! That's provydential!

SID

It does look like it. The only question is which six Hunts it's a-goin' to be. *[Coaxingly]* Now I'll tell you, Andy, I've got lots o' no-'count kin——

ANDY

No! You cain't come that on me! I got no-'count kin, too! They ain't worth killin'.

SID

I expect you're right about that, Andy.

ANDY

I know dam' well I'm right!

SID

Now look here, Andy, I want this thing done like it ought to be. *[Persuasively]* Now I'll tell you what I'll do. You go home an' study 'bout this overnight

an' come back to-morrow mornin'. If you still want to kill six of us then, I'll let you take your pick.

ANDY

Ha, ha! You think I'm a dam' fool, don't you? Well, I am; but I ain't that sort!

SID

All right, Andy, jist as you say! If you'd druther begin on what you got here now, I'll send fer 'em. Only, they ain't enough to make out your six. [*Significantly to RUFÉ*] Rufe, step out thar an' tell Pap an' Gran'pap that Andy 'ld like to see 'em here on pertickler business.

ANDY

No! [*To RUFÉ*] You grow to the place where you're a-standin'! [*Turns to SID*] Don't neither of you move a peg ner bat a eye!

SID

All right, Andy. Whatever you say's gospel as fur as I'm concerned!

ANDY

I know dam' well it is! Rufe, git your banjer! [*RUFÉ obeys, taking the banjo from a peg on the wall.*] Can you pick "Turkey in the Straw"?

RUFÉ

I use' to could. But I hain't practiced no jig tunes lately.

ANDY

You're a-goin' to practice one now! Set down thar an' let 'er go! [RUFÉ *hesitates.*] Set down, I tell you. This ain't no time to stand up fer Jesus! [RUFÉ *seats himself and strikes the first note.* ANDY *turns on SID with an expression of maudlin determination*] Sid Hunt, the Scripture says they's a time fer everything!

SID

That's right, Andy!

ANDY

I know dam' well it's right! [*He pauses to recall what he was going to say*] When the Hunts an' Lowries fought the last time, the Hunts made my gran'-daddy dance afore they shot him! [*He cocks his pistol.*] This is the time to dance!

SID

Well, you're the boss! Whatever you say goes 'ith me!

ANDY

Then cut your patchin'! [RUFÉ *strikes up "Turkey in the Straw"* and SID *starts to dance.* ANDY *follows him, keeping time with his pistol.* SID *moves gradually*

toward the outside door, but ANDY heads him off.]
Sash-i-ate! [SID dances back toward the center of the room. ANDY follows him, calling the figures with increasing tempo] For'ard an' back! Corners turn an' sash-i-ate! Hit the floor! Swing an' circle! Ladies change an' gents the same! Right an' left! The shoo-fly swing! Sash-i-ate!

[SID sashays toward the kitchen door. ANDY rushes after him.]

RUFÉ

[Seeing the muzzle of the pistol pointed in his direction, screams with terror]

Oh! Don't——!

ANDY

[Raises the pistol and covers SID]

Wait! Swing your partner! [SID turns and looks into the muzzle of the pistol.] That's right! Face the music!

[SID wipes the perspiration from his forehead, but gives no other sign of fear. JUDE appears from the kitchen.]

JUDE

Andy! What are you——

ANDY

Git to hell out o' here if you don't want a bullet in you!

[JUDE rushes forward with a piercing scream. SID springs under ANDY's arm, thrusting it upward with a twist. The pistol falls to the floor. SID releases ANDY and seizes the pistol.]

RUFÉ

Thank the Lord!

JUDE

[Rushing between ANDY and SID]

Don't kill him!

SID

I ain't a-goin' to.

ANDY

That's a lie—you air a-goin' to. Come on! You got me. Why don't you shoot?

SID

I dunno's killing you 'ld equalize things any, Andy.

JUDE

What's the matter with him, Sid?

[MEG and DAVID enter hurriedly from the kitchen]

SID

You'll have to ax somebody 'at knows. He's a-settin' out to kill as many more Hunts as the Hunts killed Lowries in a feud fifty years ago!

MEG

[With a shudder of horror]

Oh! It's all beginnin' over ag'in!

DAVID

This is your work, Rufe!

SID

Now don't go packin' it on Rufe! He done all he could to ca'm Andy!

DAVID

Mebby so! *[He looks at RUFÉ, who stands with an expression of martyrdom.]* I b'lieve in givin' the devil his dues! But he knowed Andy 'us a-drinkin' when he started that talk about the feud!

SID

My experience has been that a man don't take fire at a notion like that when he's drunk 'less he's been thinkin' some 'bout it when he's sober! *[He puts the pistol in his pocket and takes hold of ANDY'S arm.]* Come on, Andy! I'm a-goin' to put you on your horse now an' send you home, where you ought to be!

JUDE

[Steps toward him with an apologetic air]

I'll take keer of him, Sid!

SID

He's sober enough to go home by hisself. You stay here. I want to talk to you 'bout this. [*He leads ANDY out.*]

MEG

[*To DAVID*]

Go on out thar with 'em an' see 'at they don't start fightin' ag'in! [*DAVID follows them. MEG lifts her apron to her eyes and sobs despairingly.*] It's all a-startin' over jist like it did the first time! I'll never see another minute's peace now as long as I live!

JUDE

I never thought my brother 'ld act like that!

MEG

'Tain't your fault! They cain't none of us help what our folks do! [*She goes into the kitchen, weeping.*]

RUFÉ

They ain't no use grievin' about it. I'd druther see everybody live together in peace. But fer all we know, this may ha' been so ordered. If it wus it 'll all work out fer the best in the end.

JUDE

How'd Andy ever git started quarrelin' 'ith Sid?

RUFÉ

Trouble don't generally start all on one side. But I'm a friend to both of 'em an' I'm a-goin' to keep my mouth shet.

JUDE

I know Sid wouldn't ha' crossed him a-purpose when he's a-drinkin'.

RUFÉ

Well, as I said afore, I ain't a-takin' sides neither way. But Sid can be mighty overbearin' when he's a mind to.

JUDE

What'd he say to Andy?

RUFÉ

Some folks don't have to say things; they can look 'em. [*He cuts his eye at her significantly*] But you'll understand what I mean when you marry Sid.

JUDE

I hain't said yit I 'us a-goin' to marry him!

RUFÉ

[*Eagerly*]

You hain't said you wusn't?

JUDE

[With simple dignity]

No; an' I dunno's I have any call to say it now. I don't know what's a-goin' to happen now!

RUFÉ

If you do marry him you'll find out lots o' things about him that you didn't know before. I know you think I'm a-sayin' this fer selfish reasons! But I ain't! Sence I first told you I loved you, Jude, I've learned to sing "less o' self an' more o' Thee"! It's not my own good I'm after now, but your good—only yourn! An' I tell you, Jude, ef you marry Sid I know you're a-goin' to rue it the longest day you live!

JUDE

Well, suppose you an' Sid found out you both knowed the same thing about me?

RUFÉ

The question is, which is right an' which is wrong.

JUDE

An' who's a-goin' to settle that?

RUFÉ

Him—up yonder!

JUDE

Do you think He bothers his head much about who's a-goin' to marry who?

RUFÉ

I know He does! I'll tell you why!

JUDE

I'd ruther not hear it now! I got too much else to think about—with killin' in the air!

RUFÉ

But I want to explain afore it's too late. I want you to know that my love fer you wus ordained from above. The first time I ever thought o' marryin' you, Jude, 'us when I seen you in church the day I got religion!

JUDE

Mebby you wouldn't ha' thought of it then if you'd been a-studyin' 'bout your religion like you'd ought ha' been.

RUFÉ

I wus, Jude! That's jist the p'int! The whole thing 'us spiritual! I mind it jist as well as if it 'us yistidy! Preachin' 'us over an' they 'us singin' "None but Christ." When they come to the verse,

"I sighed fer rest an' happiness,
I yearned fer them, not Thee;
But while I passed my Saviour by,
His love laid hold o' me,"

I looked across the aisle an' seen you a-settin' thar a-singin'! An' sompen hot swep' over me jist like fire! At first I thought it 'us Satan a-temptin' me, an' I tried to look t'other way. I don't never look at the women's side in the meetin'-house. Anybody 'at knows me 'll tell you that. But I couldn't look no other way then. Some power greater an' stronger 'n me seemed to have holt o' my neck, a-twistin' it around toward you. I 'us absolutely helpless, jist as helpless as a child! But I didn't know what it wus till they got to the last verse. You know how it goes:

"The pleasures lost I sadly mourned,
But never wept fer Thee,
Tell grace my sightless eyes received,
Thy love-li-ness to see."

It 'us then that the scales dropped from my eyes! An' I seen the truth! An' when I did, everything in the whole world 'us changed fer me! I loved everybody an' everything! An' I 'us so happy I felt jist like I 'us a-floatin' away on a ocean o' joy!

JUDE

If you felt like that you'd better let well enough alone. I couldn't make you no happier by marryin' you.

RUFÉ

Yes, you could, Jude! [*With a mystical suggestion*]
The half has never been told!

JUDE

The half o' what?

RUFÉ

[Looks at her significantly and chants]

"I've hyeard of a beautiful city,
 Fur away in the Kingdom o' God;
 I've hyeard how its walls are o' jasper,
 How its streets are golden an' broad!
 In the midst o' the street is life's river,
 Clear as crystal an' pyor to behold.

[Rolling his eyes mystically]

Not half o' the joys that await 'em
 To mortals has ever been told!
 Not half has ever been told!
 Not half o' the joys that await 'em
 To mortals has ever been told!"

You know how the rest of it goes!

JUDE

Yeh, but that's heaven. An' they ain't no marryin'
 ner givin' in marriage thar!

RUFÉ

Yes, they is, Jude! They's spiritual marriage!
 That's what I mean!

JUDE

No, that ain't the sort you're a-thinkin' about.

RUFÉ

You're wrong thar! That's the only sort I ever think about! I can say truthfully, Jude, that I've never had a thought about you ner no other woman that I'd be ashamed to tell to the angels in heaven!

SID

[*Enters at the front, laughing*]
Angels in heaven, eh?

JUDE

Sid! Did Andy git off home all right?

SID

Not yit. I left him out thar behind the store.

JUDE

Is he sick?

SID

Yeh—but he'll soon be over it. He was throwin' it off purty fast when I left.

JUDE

You didn't give him back his pistol, did you?

SID

No. They ain't nuthin' to worry about, Jude. He'll be all right when he's sober. Besides, Grandpap's out

there with him. So I thought I'd come in an' have a little talk 'ith you; that is, if I ain't a-cuttin' short a preachment by Rufe. When I come in he was sayin' sompen 'bout angels in heaven.

JUDE

He says he can tell 'em all his thoughts about women. An' that's more 'n you can do, I expect!

SID

Ha, ha! Well, I hadn't thought about tryin' jist yit!

RUFÉ

'Tain't nothin' to laugh about! A man hain't got no right to look at a woman, much less marry 'er, tell he can think right thoughts about her!

SID

How's he a-goin' to know what sort o' thoughts he can think about her tell he looks at her?

RUFÉ

All my thoughts about 'em are right thoughts. [*Maliciously, with his eyes on JUDE*] But o' course I hain't never seen them French gals you 'us a-tellin' about while ago!

JUDE

What 'us he a-sayin' about French gals?

RUFÉ

Don't ax *me*. I ain't a-carryin' no tales.

SID

You've said enough already. [*He makes a move toward him half angrily, then stops with a puzzled expression.*] I cain't quite make you out, Rufe. I dunno whether you're a trouble breeder or whether you're jist teched in the head with religion. But whichever it is, I want you to git this much straight: Me an' Jude's a-goin' to be married, an' anything I want her to know about them French gals I'll tell her myself.

JUDE

I've never said I 'us a-goin' to marry you!

SID

Well, if you've got any doubts on the subject I'll clear 'em up [*he glances at RUFÉ significantly*] as soon as I have a chance to talk to you by yourself!

RUFÉ

You needn't knock me down with it. I'm perfectly willin' to give you your chance with Jude. I guess she can jedge whether she could be happy yoked up to a unbeliever.

[*He puts on his hat and goes out stiffly.*]

SID

[*Laughing*]

Religion certainly does take a quair turn 'ith some folks!

JUDE

It don't seem to be a-troublin' you none. Sid, how'd Andy ever come to think o' shootin' you?

SID

You got me! He'd been mixin' his licker, I reckon.

JUDE

That don't 'count fer it! What 'd you mean while ago when you said a man didn't act like Andy when he's drunk 'less he's been studyin' some about it when he's sober?

SID

Jist what I said. He don't generally.

JUDE

Then you think Andy's been holdin' a grudge ag'in' you?

SID

I cain't account fer him flarin' up like he did no other way. Has he ever said anything to you about evenin' up the score between the Hunts an' Lowries? [*She starts and takes a step away from him with instinctive distrust.*] You needn't be afraid to tell me!

JUDE

I ain't afraid to tell nobody the truth! [*With suppressed emotion*] It's a lie I'd be afraid to tell—er to act! [*She sees from his expression that he doesn't understand her.*] I b'lieve you know more about what started Andy's tantrum 'n you purtend to!

SID

Jude, you don't think I picked a fuss 'ith Andy!

JUDE

I dunno what I think! But I know Andy didn't bear no grudge ag'in' you!

SID

The chances are he wouldn't ha' told you if he had!

JUDE

An' I wouldn't tell *you*—if you did ask me!

SID

Why wouldn't you?

JUDE

'Cause Andy's my brother! That's reason enough, ain't it?

SID

But I'm the man that's a-goin' to marry you!

JUDE

That's what you've been a-sayin'.

SID

Well, you are a-goin' ter marry me, ain't you?

JUDE

I wus mebbe—before. But now—I dunno.

SID

Now see here, Jude! If this trouble with Andy is a-standin' between us we might as well settle it right now.

JUDE

[*With a flare of passion*]

You got no right to make me take sides ag'in' my own flesh an' blood!

SID

I ain't a-goin' to try to make you. That's sompen you'll have to decide fer yourself. The Bible says a man an' woman ought to leave their daddy an' mammy an' all the rest o' their kin an' stick together in spite o' the devil—at least, that's the sense of it. I don't purtend to pattern after Scripture like Rufe, but that part allus hit me as bein' jist about right. An' if you don't feel the same way, I want to know it now.

JUDE

But I— [*She looks at him dumbly.*]

SID

They ain't no room fer "buts" here, Jude. If you've got any doubt about whose side you'd be on in a fight between me an' your folks, you'd better give yourself the benefit of 'em.

JUDE

I couldn't never go back on my own kin!

SID

Then that's settled. [*He turns away.*] We don't belong together.

JUDE

You don't actially think our folks are a-goin' to start fightin' ag'in, do you, Sid?

SID

Not if I can keep 'em from it. But that ain't the p'int; if they do start, I don't want no weak sister fer a wife. If a woman ain't fur a man she's purty apt to be ag'in' him. They don't come a-settin' on the fence.

JUDE

You mean I got to—take sides ag'in' my own folks?

SID

I mean you've got to stand by me if you marry me.
[*She looks at him helplessly. He meets her gaze firmly, without flinching.*]

JUDE

[*Breaks down, sobbing*]

But it ain't right! You know it ain't right to go ag'in' my own blood!

SID

Well, nobody ain't a-makin' you marry me.

JUDE

[*Turns on him angrily*]

What do you keep on a-sayin' that fer when it ain't so! You know I cain't do nothin' else!

[*She sobs incoherently and puts her arms about him.*]

SID

[*Embracing her tenderly*]

I sorter hoped you couldn't, Jude. But I wanted you to find out fer yourself.

JUDE

[*Still sobbing*]

I'm a-goin' to do what's right, but it's terrible hard. Andy's my own brother! 'Tain't in human nacher to——

SID

Don't you worry about that! They ain't a-goin' to be no trouble. I jist wanted to find out whar you stood in case they wus. But you jist leave all that to me. Nuthin' ain't a-goin' to happen to Andy ner nobody else.

[MATT and DAVID are seen coming toward the front door. SID and JUDE separate. JUDE turns away toward the kitchen to hide her tears.]

DAVID

Sid, me and Matt— [Sees JUDE and hesitates.]
Step out here a minute, Sid.

SID

Is it about Andy?

DAVID

Yeh.

SID

Well, you can talk afore Jude. Me an' her's decided to git married.

DAVID

Well, I'm glad o' that!

MATT

Mebbe it 'll help to keep the peace.

SID

It 'd orter. Go right ahead an' say what you're a-mind to. Jude knows all about the row with Andy, and they ain't no doubt where she stands.

DAVID

Well, Matt and me's been a-talkin' it over an' we think you'd better ride up an' ax Andy's daddy to come down here.

JUDE

What do you want 'ith Paw?

DAVID

We want to talk to him 'bout Andy.

SID

Whyn't you wait tell Andy's hisself ag'in an' let me an' him talk this over? I never knowed no good to come o' one o' these fam'ly talkin'-matches yit. Me an' Andy can patch things up if you'll jist let us alone.

DAVID

This ain't no time fer patchwork. I want to git Jim Lowry right here on the ground, face to face 'ith you an' Andy, an' tell him edzactly what happened afore the tale has a chance to grow. I've allus found him reasonable enough.

[RUFÉ *enters at the front.*]

RUFÉ

Jude, Andy said tell you he 'us ready to start home now an' to ax you if you 'us a-goin' with him.

JUDE

[To DAVID]

Do you want him to wait tell you send fer Paw? If you do I'll tell him.

DAVID

That's my advice, but I don't want to be pig-headed about it.

SID

I don't, neither. Mebby your way's the best. But if Andy's reached the state o' 'countability ag'in, I'd like to know how he stands on it afore we send fer his daddy. I know if I 'us Andy it 'ld jist make me mad.

JUDE

I'll talk to him an' see what he says. [*She goes out.*]

SID

How is he now, Rufe—sober enough to ride his horse home?

RUFÉ

Yeh, I reckon so. I never seed licker go to nobody's head like it did to hisn. When a man talks as wild as

he did while ago, I believe it 'ld be better fer everybody concerned—hisself included—to put him behind bars. If I 'us in your place I'd certainly have him bound by law to keep the peace.

DAVID

Folks that *can* be bound by law to keep the peace don't have to be. They're blood kin to them that looks around fer somebody to hold 'em when a fight starts. Andy belongs to t'other breed. [*Goes to window, turns to MATT and SID*] They must ha' been a reg'lar toad-strangler up the river last night. She's a-b'ilin' like a kittle o' fish!

MATT

I noticed it 'us risin' purty sharp as me an' Sid crossed the bridge.

SID

'Tain't out o' banks yit, is it?

DAVID

Nowhere 'cept in the low places. She soon will be, though, if she keeps on! I never seed the ole sow a-gittin' her bristles up so fast!

RUFÉ

They'd be a camp-meetin' time if that big dam busted, an' they's one wing of it that ain't finished yit.

DAVID

You needn't lose no sleep over that. I 'us up thar t'other day, an' they ain't water enough this side o' Jordan to shake that wall. Nothin' short of a box o' dynamite 'ld ever make a dent on it.

RUFÉ

It wouldn't surprise me much if some o' the folks that fit so hard to keep 'em from puttin' it in tried blastin' to git it out. They's one of 'em that's been a-sendin' to town by me fer a mighty heap o' dynamite to dig wells with.

DAVID

In my opinion, Rufe, you've been usin' a good part o' that dynamite yourself.

RUFÉ

Me! I'd like to know what I'd be usin' it fer!

DAVID

To kill fish. I've seed you come back several times lately 'ith a fine string o' trout. An' I never noticed no hook marks in their mouths.

RUFÉ

I allus fish 'ith a tiny little pin-hook, to keep from tearin' their mouths! I'm thankful to say I can ketch

'em 'cordin' to law. I don't have to blast 'em out 'ith dynamite! [*He goes out.*]

MATT

[*Glances in the direction that he has gone*]

Somebody's been a-blastin' 'em lately. I've seed lots o' little uns a-floatin' downstream dead.

ANDY

[*In the distance*]

I'm all right—you don't need to help me.

[*JUDE is seen coming toward the door with him. He is much sobered, but still slightly unsteady on his legs. There is a moment of constrained silence as he enters and looks about him.*]

SID

Here, Andy, have a cheer!

ANDY

[*Hangs his head shamefacedly*]

No. Much obliged. I can stand all right. Jude said you axed her to marry you.

SID

Yeh, that's right, Andy.

ANDY

Well, I reckon they ain't no use in tellin' you that I made a fool o' myself while ago. You 'us all here an' seed it. But she wanted me to say it, and— [*He stops, unable to find suitable words.*]

SID

Fergit it, Andy. That's what I'm a-goin' to do. Somebody done some purty tall talkin', I admit. But I expect it 'us the licker you drunk, instid o' you.

ANDY

I dunno 'bout that. But I know it 'us me that drunk the licker!

DAVID

'Tain't none o' my business, Andy, but if I found out they 'us truck I couldn't put inside o' me 'thout addlin' my brains, I'll be derved if I wouldn't keep it out er bust!

ANDY

I'm a-goin' to keep it out hereafter if I know myself!

SID

Then here's sompen you can take home with you when you start.

[*He takes ANDY's pistol out of his pocket and offers it to him.*]

ANDY

[Starts to take it and stops]

No! I'll git it some other time!

SID

[Puzzled]

Why don't you want to take it now?

ANDY

I dunno whether I'm sober enough yit!

SID

Ha, ha! If that's all 'at's worryin' you, I'll run the resk!

[He drops the pistol in ANDY's holster.]

JUDE

[Nervously]

We'd better be goin', Andy!

SID

Wait till I saddle a horse an' I'll go a piece with you. I want to see how it feels to have my feet in stirrups ag'in after walkin' all over the world.

DAVID

[Who has been looking at the weather signs]

I don't want to hurry nobody off, but from the way the clouds air a-b'ilin' over the mountain thar it

wouldn't s'rprise me if we had fallin' weather ag'in afore night.

[MATT goes out to look at the clouds.]

SID

Well, I ain't skeered of a little water.

[He goes out.]

DAVID

I ain't, nuther. But I'm like all Baptists; I abominate havin' it sprinkled on me.

JUDE

[Looks into the kitchen, then turns to DAVID]

Where'd Miz Hunt go?

DAVID

I expect she's out thar a-roundin' up her young turkeys. 'Bout half of 'em got draggled in the rain yis-tidy, an' they're droopin' an' dyin' like good children.

[JUDE goes out through the kitchen. DAVID follows her. ANDY sits gloomily, his face in his hands. RUFÉ enters at the front and looks at him fur-tively.]

RUFÉ

[Comes forward]

Well, Andy, I jist hyeard Matt say everythin' is all smoothed over an' they ain't a-goin' to be no more trouble.

ANDY

[*Grunts, without looking at him*]

Yeh, that's right.

RUFÉ

I certainly hope it is.

ANDY

I ain't a-goin' ter rake up the past, if Sid don't! An' I guess he won't, now that he's a-goin' to marry Jude.

RUFÉ

[*Starts*]

Oh, is he a-goin' ter marry her?

ANDY

Yeh, they got it all fixed up.

RUFÉ

That 'd orter help some. [*Then with a nervous laugh*] I see you got your pistol back. [*Comes toward ANDY, lowering his voice guardedly*] Andy, if I tell you sompen as a friend, will you swear on the Bible never to breathe it to a soul?

ANDY

My word's as good as my oath!

RUFÉ

I know it is! An' that's all I want!

ANDY

Then consider 'at you've got it!

RUFÉ

[*Comes still closer to him*]

You value your life, don't you, Andy?

ANDY

I reckon I do. I've had plenty o' chances to throw it away, an' I hain't took none of 'em yit.

RUFÉ

Well, you got another now! [*Significantly*] If I 'us in your place I'd make myself as scarce as hen teeth around here!

ANDY

What are you drivin' at? Have they got a bullet salted fer me?

RUFÉ

[*Gives him an eloquent look*]

If they have they hain't told me!

ANDY

I don't want to know what they've told you! I want to know what you know!

RUFÉ

As man to man?

ANDY

Yeh, as man to man!

RUFÉ

I'm a-takin' a big chance to tell you! But you've allus been my friend, Andy! An' I'll stick by a friend tell Jedgment. They're all I got left in the world!

ANDY

[*Impatiently*]

Well, come on! What are they up to?

RUFÉ

Jist now—afore you come in——

ANDY

Yeh?

RUFÉ

Sid an' his daddy an' the ole rooster 'us a-holdin' a inquest over you!

ANDY

A inquest!

RUFÉ

That's what *I'd* call it!

ANDY

What 'us the verdick—death from nachel causes?

RUFÉ

They didn't edzackly *say* that.

ANDY

But you know what they meant?

RUFÉ

We never *know* nothin' in this world. But my advice to you is not to let Sid ketch you by yourself in a lonesome spot in the woods 'less you want to wear a wooden overcoat.

ANDY

If that's his game, why didn't he let daylight through me when he had a good excuse? [*Lays his hand on his pistol*] An' what'd he gimme back my pistol fer?

RUFÉ

You don't know Sid like I do. He's deeper 'n he looks. If he'd ha' killed you while ago when he had a chance, Jude 'ld never ha' married him. But he's made hisself solid 'ith her now by lettin' you off. He can afford to wait to put you to sleep tell they ain't nobody a-lookin', though that ain't a-pesterin' his mind much, fer he knows the law cain't tetch him.

ANDY

Why cain't it?

RUFÉ

'Cause you threatened his life in the presence o' witnesses.

ANDY

Has he got all that figgered out aforehand?

RUFÉ

That an' more. [*He hears footsteps outside and glances toward the door.*] Here he comes now. You watch him! He'll be so smooth with you that butter won't melt in his mouth! [*SID enters briskly.*]

SID

I'm ready, Andy, if you are. Where's Jude?

ANDY

I dunno! She went out thar to look fer your mammy!

SID

Jist set still. I'll call her. I hope your head ain't a-feelin' top heavy, fer I expect we're a-goin' to have to do some hard ridin' to keep ahead o' that cloud. It looks like it might rain tadpoles.
[*He goes out through the kitchen.*]

RUFÉ

Thar! What 'd I tell you!

ANDY

Well, I've done all I could! I admitted to 'im 'at I 'us wrong to breach that ole fight ag'in!

RUFÉ

I know you did, Andy. An' 'tain't a-goin' to do you no good to eat more dirt fer 'em 'less you're prepared to eat six feet of it. Fer I hyeard Sid tell his daddy that you wusn't the sort o' man as could be bound by his word to keep the peace.

ANDY

'That's sompen I cain't understand, Rufe! If I had it in my heart to kill a man, I couldn't act toward him like I 'us his friend!

RUFÉ

Me nuther. I b'lieve in speakin' my mind an' lettin' whatever comes up come out.' But you have to fight fire with fire; you cain't afford to take no chances when your life's at stake.

ANDY

What 'ld you do if you 'us in my place?

RUFÉ

I ain't a-sayin' what I *would* do, but I know 'one thing I *wouldn't*: I wouldn't wait fer him to git the drop on me! I'd be the early bird!

ANDY

No! I won't shoot first, 'less he starts it! But I'm a-goin' to keep my eyes glued on him, an' the first suspicious move he makes [*he pats the handle of his pistol caressingly*] one or t'other of us 'll be buzzards' meat!

RUFÉ

[*Insinuatingly*]

That's all right—if he don't take a crack at you from the bushes!

[*It has grown suddenly darker. A gust of wind strikes the house, followed by thunder and lightning.*

SID, JUDE, DAVID and MEG enter from kitchen.]

SID

Andy, looks like it's a-tunin' up fer a reg'lar harricane! What do you say to havin' your horse put up an' stayin' a while longer?

ANDY

No, I guess I'll be movin' along.

SID

You might jist as well stay.

DAVID

Yeh, why not?

ANDY

I got to go!

SID

Andy, I hope you ain't got a notion 'at they's any hard feelin's [*claps him on the shoulder*], 'cause they ain't.

DAVID

'Course not!

SID

Jude 'll stay. Won't you, Jude?

JUDE

I reckon I'd better. They won't expect me back in a storm. They won't expect Andy, neither.

ANDY

I've told you 'at I'm a-goin', storm er no storm!

SID

Well, you know your own business. Ef you're sot on goin', let's git started. [*Starts out.*]

MEG

[*Stopping him*]

Sid, they ain't no need o' your goin'!

SID

Yes, they is. Whatever Andy's reason fer goin' is, I reckon I got a better one. I don't intend to waste no

time a-gittin' things settled with Jude's paw. An' I couldn't ha' picked a better time. If he makes any objection, I'll have the ups on him while she's water-bound!

JUDE

I dunno's water 'ld help you keep me here ef I didn't want to stay!

SID

[*Laughs*]

Well, anyway, I'll tell your folks not to expect you tell you git thar. Are you ready, Andy?

ANDY

You bet your boots I am! I'm ready fer anything—hell er high water!

SID

[*Glances at the sky*]

It looks like we might have a little o' both afore long! [*Calls back*] I'll be back fer supper if nothin' happens!

[*He goes out with ANDY. MEG follows them to the door and looks after them anxiously. Pause.*]

RUFÉ

[*Goes to the door and stands by MEG*]

I wouldn't worry! If any harm's a-goin' to come to 'em, worryin' won't stop it!

MEG

I wusn't thinkin' 'bout that so much as this everlastin' rain! I'd think it 'ld git out o' water some time an' stop! We hain't had three hours o' sunshine on a stretch in over a month!

DAVID

Well, I wouldn't lose heart jist because you've had a few turkeys drabbled! Think what a time old Noah's wife had a-roundin' up her menagery! [MEG goes to the fireplace and begins fumbling with the kindling.] What in the nation are you a-buildin' a fire fer? You ain't cold?

MEG

No, but the air feels damp. An' everything in the house molds so if I don't dry it out once an' a while!

DAVID

Then lemme start it fer you! [*He takes the kindling and proceeds to lay the fire.*] I never seed a woman yit that could build a fire 'thout gittin' it catawampused!

JUDE

I've noticed that all the things that men want to do are a man's job; an' them they don't, like washin' dishes an' milkin', are a woman's.

DAVID

Then how do you 'count fer it that when I tried milkin' fer you a long time ago the ole cow kicked so I couldn't? She seemed to know it wusn't a man's job!

MEG

She had room to kick. You pinched her teats to make her!

DAVID

Lord forgive you, Meg! How'd you ever come to think a thing like that?

MEG

I didn't think it. I hyeard you a-braggin' about it to Sid one day when you thought I wusn't a-listenin'.

DAVID

That's the trouble 'ith women these days: they've been a-listenin' to men's talk till they've got too smart fer comfort! If they keep on, I dunno how men are a-goin' to live 'ith the next generation of 'em!

JUDE

I dunno's I'd live 'ith one that pinched my cow to keep from milkin' her.

DAVID

Then you'd better warn Sid as soon as you marry him, fer it 'ld be jist like him to try it!

MEG

'Course it would, now 'at you've put him up to it!

DAVID

Well, as long as the women tell the gals all they know, it's nothin' but right that men should give their kind the benefit o' their experience. If they didn't, the women 'ld soon be on top!

RUFÉ

I dunno's that 'ld be sich a calamity. If women had their way they'd be less fightin' an' drinkin' an' more folks a-workin' fer the comin' o' the Kingdom o' Heaven on earth!

MEG

At least they'd be fewer a-pinchin' pore dumb brutes to git out o' doin' any sort o' work. Men ain't perfect. I can think o' lots o' ways o' improvin' the breed.

DAVID

It's a quair thing to me that woman, ever sence the Lord made her out o' man's crookedest part, has allus considered it her main job to keep him straight!

MEG

If that's her main job, she's made a purty pore job of it!

DAVID

Well, a man's got to stay on top, somehow.

RUFÉ

Yeh! By hook er by crook!

DAVID

Edzactly! The strong uns do it by hook an' the weak uns by crook! That's the only difference! [*A shot is heard in the distance, followed almost instantly by a second. They all start and look at one another in alarm, as if afraid to put their fear in words. DAVID continues with pretended indifference*] Wus that somebody a-shootin'?

MEG

Yes! [*She rushes to the door and listens.*]

DAVID

Which way wus it?

MEG

[*With a half-dazed expression, her eyes in the distance*]

Up the road!

DAVID

Oh, I reckon it's Andy a-lettin' off steam!

RUFÉ

Yeh, that must ha' been what it wus.

MEG

It couldn't ha' been Andy! He hain't got his pistol!

JUDE

Oh! [*She sinks into a chair.*]

MEG

[*Pityingly*]

Now they ain't no use in that, Jude! I know what you're thinkin'; but if Sid had wanted to harm Andy he'd ha' done it here while ago!

JUDE

That ain't what I'm skeered of!

MEG

[*With sudden change of expression as the idea dawns on her*]

Did Sid give Andy back his pistol?

JUDE

[*Almost inaudibly, nodding her head*]

Yes!

MEG

[*Looks first at JUDE and then at DAVID with blazing eyes*]

What 'd he do it fer?

DAVID

Why, Meg, I b'lieve you're plum tarryfied! They ain't no sense in makin' things no wuss 'n they are!

[*A horse is heard approaching at a gallop.*]

MEG

[*Turns eagerly in the direction of the sound*]

What's that?

DAVID

It's Sid a-comin' back. I reckon he must ha' forgot sompen. It beats me the way you can make a bear outen a bush!

RUFÉ

[*Sympathetically*]

She cain't help her thoughts!

MEG

[*Who has stepped outside on the doorstep, utters a piercing cry*]

Oh, God!

[*RUFÉ runs to the door and looks out. MEG turns and*

staggers blindly into the house, her face covered with her apron. DAVID and JUDE catch her as she is about to sink to the floor.]

DAVID

Dern it all, Meg, what's the matter with you? [*As they place her in a chair*] I declare I never seed a growed-up woman as chicken-hearted as she is!

RUFÉ

[*Shakes his head ominously*]

That *does* look bad!

DAVID

What looks bad, you dad-burned fool!

RUFÉ

Nothin'—only that 'us Sid's horse 'ith the empty saddle that she seed a-turnin' in at the barn gate!

DAVID

Well, what if it wus?

RUFÉ

Nothin'! I jist don't like the looks of it! That's all!

DAVID

Well, I hope it's all from you!

MEG

[Rocks back and forth, sobbing]

They ain't no use in foolin' ourselves! It's happened!
He's dead! Andy's killed him!

DAVID

Now stop your ravin', Meg! They's a thousand ways
that horse might ha' got loose! It might ha' throwed
him!

[MATT enters at the front, grim and determined.]

MATT

No, it didn't! It's not a buckin' horse! You know
that as well as I do! An' I've never seed it skeer at
nothin' sence I got it! *[He takes the shotgun from the
rack and starts out.]*

DAVID

[Takes the rifle]

Wait! I'm a-goin' with you an' see what's happened!

MEG

Matt! Don't take the guns! If Sid's dead, fightin'
won't bring him back!

MATT

I never said it would. If he's dead, my business is 'ith the man that killed him!

RUFÉ

Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord! I will repay!

DAVID

He has to have a instrument to work through! Even God cain't smite evildoers 'thout a fist!

[*He goes out with MATT. MEG sways back and forth despairingly.*]

MEG

If they is a God an' He's almighty like they say, I cain't see why He don't stop things like this!

RUFÉ

Mebby He don't want to stop 'em!

MEG

Then He ain't a just God!

RUFÉ

[*Moves away from her instinctively*]

I wouldn't say things like that, Meg! All His jedgments are just an' righteous altogether!

JUDE

Do you call it right fer Sid to go through the war an' then be struck down by Andy the minute he gits home?

RUFÉ

That ain't fer us to say. [*Piously*] He knows what Sid done while he 'us away in the war. We don't.

JUDE

Andy ain't a God-fearin' man, neither!
[*A vivid flash of lightning illumines the scene.*]

RUFÉ

I know he ain't. An' vengeance is on his track, too. It's writ that the heathen shall rage an' the wicked destroy one another. That's a part o' God's plan.

JUDE

That don't make it right!

RUFÉ

God don't have to jestify his ways to man. Let Him be right if you have to make out everybody else wrong's what I say, an' they's good Scripture fer it.

JUDE

They's Scripture fer everything! Job's wife told him to cuss God an' die!

[*A loud clap of thunder shakes the house. RUFÉ shrinks away toward the stairs.*]

RUFÉ

If you're a-goin' to talk blasphemy, 'ith a thunder-cloud a-comin' up, I'll have to leave you!

[*He goes halfway up the stairs and stops. MEG puts on her bonnet and throws a shawl about her shoulders.*]

JUDE

Are you a-goin' out?

MEG

Yes! I cain't set here! [JUDE *prepares to follow her.*]

JUDE

I cain't neither. I'll go with you and see if they've found him. Ef Sid's dead, I'll kill the man 'at killed him—if it's my own brother!

MEG

That won't bring Sid back, but it 'ld leave the Hunts' hands clean. An' mebbey it might keep the war from startin' ag'in. [*Hopelessly*] But you won't do it. You'll find blood's thicker 'n water.

JUDE

[*With resolution*]

I will—I'll kill him 'ith my own hands!

[*They go out together. RUFÉ creeps down the stairs in a state of intense excitement.*]

RUFÉ

It 'ld be awful if she killed her own brother! I couldn't marry a woman that had done that! [*He goes to the door and makes a move as if to call to JUDE, but stops.*] She won't do it. She couldn't. It wouldn't be nachel. They'll see him first, anyhow. O God! Don't let her commit a sin that she could never git fergiveness fer! [*The kitchen door opens and SID enters. RUFÉ recoils with a cry of terror*] A-a-a-ah! [*SID looks at him in amazement.*] Is that you, Sid?

SID

I sorter thought mebby it wus! What the hell's the matter with you? Are you havin' a fit?

RUFÉ

No, I'm all right! You come in kinder ghost-like an' I thought mebbe you might ha' been killed!

SID

You thought right. I might ha' been.

RUFÉ

What's happened to Andy?

SID

I dunno. Where's all the folks?

RUFÉ

I hain't seen 'em. I jist now come downstairs.

SID

They ain't all out o' the house in this storm?

RUFÉ

They must be out at the barn, lookin' arter the critters.

SID

Yeh, I reckon that's it.

RUFÉ

Sid, you didn't do nuthin' to rile Andy, did you?

SID

Not to my knowledge I didn't. My saddle geart wus loose an' I got off my horse to fix it. He seed me reach in my back pocket fer my knife, an' afore you could say scat he jerked out his pistol an' put a bullet through my hat!

RUFÉ

I shore am glad it 'us your hat, Sid, an' not you!

SID

Well, I ain't sorry, myself. [*He pokes his finger through the bullet hole in his hat.*] It's a good hat, but a air-hole er two won't hurt nothin' this sort o' weather.

RUFÉ

What 'd he do arter he shot at you?

SID

I didn't stay to see. When I found out he meant business I turned my horse loose an' cut fer the bushes. I'd like to know what's got into Andy.

RUFÉ

'Tis quair the way he's actin'!

SID

[*Comes toward RUFÉ thoughtfully*]

What 'd he say to you up thar while ago when you give him that lick—afore it all started?

RUFÉ

[*Starts violently*]

Nothin'! He didn't say nothin', I tell you—not a word! [SID looks at him suspiciously. He flares up in a fit of anger] You needn't try to accuse me! I never put him up to it! [Sobbing] O God! I wish I 'us

dead! Every time anything goes wrong it's me! I'm to blame!

SID

I ain't accusin' you o' puttin' him up to it! What I want to know is how his mind got to runnin' so strong on that old war 'twixt the Hunts an' the Lowries!

RUFÉ

You hyeard what I said about it here! That's all I know!

SID

Then what are you a-gittin' so excited about?

RUFÉ

It's enough to excite anybody, to have a thing like that throwed up to him! An' you needn't ax me no more questions, fer I ain't a-goin' to answer 'em!

SID

All right! I'll ask Andy when I see him!

RUFÉ

If you do he'll only tell you a mess o' lies! You cain't believe him!

SID

Oh, so you're afraid he'll tell lies on you?

RUFÉ

Any man 'll lie to save his own skin, ef you git 'im in a tight corner.

SID

Well, I'm a-goin' to ax him, 'cause I'm curious to know jist what them lies air that you're afraid he's a-goin' to tell. [*Going to window*] You say the folks is at the barn? They ain't no light thar. Did my hoss come back?

RUFÉ

I dunno!

SID

Have they gone after Andy?

RUFÉ

I told you I don't know!

SID

[*Glances at gun rack*]

The guns are gone! Jist what I thought! [*Starts to rush out.*]

RUFÉ

[*Stopping him*]

Hold on, Sid; you cain't do nuthin' 'bout it now! They must ha' left afore you come in, and they'd natchelly go the short way and be halfway over the mountain by this time! It's too late to stop 'em now!

SID

By God, you don't want me to stop 'em. I believe you knowed all along where they wus, only you 'us afraid o' what Andy could tell.

RUFÉ

That's right! Blame it on me! I don't wish him no harm! I don't wish nobody no harm!

SID

Does that telephone wire along the river run from the dam to the settlement over thar?

RUFÉ

Why? Are you a-thinkin' o' phonin' from the dam to head off Matt an' your gran'daddy?

SID

That's my business. As I mind it, the phone's in that tool house on a ledge right down under the dam!

RUFÉ

You'd never git to that house now! You'd have to walk out to it on boards across that sluice o' water! It's dangerous when the river ain't up! You might jist as well commit suicide as try it now! I wouldn't

do it to save my own brother, let alone a man 'at had tried to kill me! An' all you'll git out o' Andy is a passel o' lies about me! Natchelly he'll say I agged him on——

SID

[Seizing him by the throat]

An', damn you, I believe that's jist what you did do!

RUFE

[Screams hysterically]

No, I didn't, Sid! I swear to God I didn't! All I said wus that you 'us a dangerous man an' not to cross you! That if you got started——

SID

[Tightening his grip]

So! I'm right! You *wus* at the bottom of it. Did you do it apurpose?

RUFE

God forgive you, Sid, fer sich a thought!

SID

An' God damn you!

[He hurls RUFE into a corner of the room and rushes out at the front. A blinding flash of lightning envelops him. RUFE lies on his elbow, cowering in

fear, till the thunder crashes and reverberates. Then suddenly he rises to his knees and clasps his hands in prayer.]

RUFÉ

Did you hear what he said, God? I can put up 'ith his insults to me, but when it comes to blaspheming Thy holy name it does look like it's time to call a halt. But You know what You're a-doin', God, an' I don't. I'm only a ignerunt sinner. You know more in a min-it 'n I could ever know in a million years. It bothers me, though, Lord, that You let the wicked prosper more 'n the righteous. They git the best o' everything in this world now. It wusn't so in Bible times, Lord. Then You cut the wicked down afore the congregation o' Israel. An' the dread o' You an' the fear o' You wus on all people. But now Your name is a byword among sinners. You hyeard that Yourself jist now.

[His voice has been gradually increasing in volume till it culminates in an emotional climax. He rises and goes to the door, trembling in every limb.]

I ain't presumin' to give You advice, Lord! You know Your own business. But if You'd make an edzample o' this blasphemer—if You'd strike him down in the abomination of his wickedness by a bolt o' lightning, it 'ld serve as a warnin' to all like him. An' they'd be sich another revival o' ole-time religion in these

mountains as You've never seed sence the earthquake.

[He pauses again as if struck by a new thought. His knees gradually give way beneath him and he sinks to the floor.]

In Your Holy Word, Lord, I know You commanded your servants to slay all blasphemers. Mebby You think that's enough. An' mebby it ought to be.

[He pleads with great fervor]

But I'd druther You'd do it Yourself, Lord. You can do it better 'n I can. An' it 'ld have more effect. But I want You to understand, God, that I ain't no coward. If it don't suit You to do it Yourself—I'll do it fer You—I don't keer if they hang me. You died fer me once, an' I'm willin' to die fer You if You want me to. They wus a time, Lord, when my proud heart said, "All o' self an' none o' Thee". Then You come a-knockin' at the door o' my sinful soul an' I whispered, "Some o' self an' some o' Thee". But that's all changed now, Lord. I'm Yourn an' You are mine. An' the burden o' my song now is, "None o' self an' all o' Thee." You can do with me what You please, Lord. If it's Your will that this blasphemer shall die, I've got a whole box o' dynamite out in the store, with a time fuse long enough so I can git back here afore it explodes. I can blow up the dam while he's under thar a-telephonin', an' the waters o' Your wrath 'll sweep over him like they did over Pharaoh an' his hosts in

olden times! An' the fear o' You an' the dread o' You 'll be on all nations ag'in!

[A heavy gust of wind strikes the house, followed by terrific thunder and lightning. RUFÉ rises to a standing position, his knees trembling. As the noise of the thunder dies away his fear is transformed into joy. He stands firmly on his feet and looks toward heaven, his voice ringing out triumphantly]

I hear You, Lord! An', like Joshua o' old, I go to do Your will!

[He rushes out.]

CURTAIN

ACT III

The same scene, a quarter of an hour later. It is now totally dark outside. The only light within is a warm glow from the fireplace. The storm has settled into a steady downpour of rain. There are still occasional flashes of lightning mingled with the distant rumbling of thunder.

MATT appears at the front door, driving ANDY before him at the point of a gun. DAVID follows them into the house, shaking the water from his hat at the door. ANDY seats himself, laughing defiantly in a mood of reckless despair.

MATT

[Glances about the room, then calls upstairs]

H'llo! H'llo, Sid! *[Looks at ANDY.]* Hm!

DAVID

'Parently they ain't *nobody* here.

MATT

[Goes to the kitchen door and calls]

Sid! H'llo! *[Comes back, his eyes on ANDY.]* Jist as I expected!

ANDY

[Tauntingly, in a spirit of bravado]

Well, I must ha' been a better shot 'n I thought I wus!

MATT

[With a growl of rage]

Yeh, an' now 'at that p'int is settled——
[He brings his gun to bear on ANDY significantly.]

DAVID

[Seizes the barrel of the gun and thrusts it upward]

Hold on, Matt! I've seed more fightin' 'n you ever did. An' we ain't a-goin' to start another row 'ith the Lowries lessen we have to. Sid might ha' come back, an' then set out ag'in arter us. We could ha' missed him easy enough if he 'us on hossback when we took that short cut across the mountain.

MATT

[Reluctantly]

All right! I'll see if his hoss is still at the barn.
[He goes out through the kitchen.]

DAVID

Andy, if I 'us as near hell as you air, I wouldn't try to hurry matters none.

ANDY

[Chants derisively]

If I git thar afore you do I'll tell 'em you're a-comin' too!

DAVID

[Looks at him understandingly]

Hmn!

[He seats himself, his gun across his knees, ready for quick action.]

ANDY

[Gazes at DAVID defiantly till the silence begins to get on his nerves]

Well, ole Rooster! Whyn't you say sompen? How's your whiskers?

DAVID

They're 'bout as common, Andy. How's everything 'ith you?

ANDY

Fine as a fiddle. I never felt better in my life.

DAVID

You're a-lookin' well.

ANDY

That's more 'n I can say fer you. *[Laughs.]* Do you know what you look like, a-settin' thar 'ith that ole lock, stock an' bar'l that you call a gun?

DAVID

I expect I look a right smart like Johnny-on-the-spot to some folks I could name.

ANDY

Not to me, you don't! You look edzackly like a crow sign in a watermillon patch! You ought to hire yourself out fer one! It 'ld give you sompen to do an' wouldn't skeer the crows none!

DAVID

I've skeered bigger game 'n crows in my time.

ANDY

You've never skeered me—if that's what you're a-drivin' at!

DAVID

You cain't fool me, Andy. A man don't work as hard as you're a-workin' now to prove he ain't skeered unless he is.

[RUFÉ *rushes up to the door, panting from exhaustion.*

He sees DAVID and stops suddnely in the doorway.]

DAVID

You seem to be in a hurry, Rufe.

RUFÉ

[*Confused*]

Yeh—I—I wanted to git in out o' the rain. It's got so I have sore throat every time I git wet.

DAVID

Where's Meg an' Jude?

RUFÉ

They stepped up the road a little piece to see if they could find out anything about Sid.

DAVID

Then he didn't come back here?

RUFÉ

[*Hesitates, confusedly*]

Who—Sid? If he did I didn't see him! An' I've been out o' the house fer jist a minute. I jist stepped out to the spring an' back to see if the milk box 'us flooded. [*Eagerly*] Didn't *you* see ner hear nothin' of him?

DAVID

[*Glances at ANDY*]

Nothin' we could count on.

RUFÉ

Well, he couldn't ha' come home 'thout me— [*He sees ANDY and starts guiltily.*] Oh! Air you here, Andy?

ANDY

Yeh, I'm here. I got a invitation I jist couldn't refuse.

RUFÉ

[*Tentativeley, to DAVID*]

Couldn't Andy tell you nothin' 'bout Sid?

ANDY

[*Significantly*]

I could, Rufe, but didn't! All I told 'em wus that I shot at him, an' as fur as I could see I missed him. [*RUFÉ breathes more easily. ANDY continues in the same spirit of bravado, glancing at DAVID*] But they wouldn't ha' been no doubt about it if I hadn't drunk so much pop-skull that my hand 'us shaky!

RUFÉ

You ought to thank the Lord you didn't hit him, Andy!

ANDY

No! If I didn't hit him it 'us the lickér saved him this time, not the Lord!

[*MATT enters through the kitchen door, carrying a*

lighted lantern. RUFÉ shrinks back into the corner near the bed.]

MATT

He ain't at the barn, an' the hoss is in the stall! Does that satisfy you? [*He makes a menacing move toward ANDY.*]

DAVID

[Stopping him]

Not edzackly. Arter all, Sid might ha' been crippled so he couldn't git home. Afore you start shootin' you'd better take the lantern an' search that patch o' woods. I'll 'tend to Andy.

MATT

In that case we'd orter tie him up. If you ever take your eyes offen him it 'ld be jist like him to snatch that ole gun an' blow your brains out.

DAVID

I'll take my chance o' that. But we can tie him if it 'll ease your mind any. I'll git a hame-string.

[He goes into the kitchen. There is a brief silence.]

MATT places the lantern on the floor, keeping his eyes on ANDY and his gun ready.]

RUFÉ

[To break the silence]

I certainly do hope 'at nothin' ain't happened to Sid!

[A loud explosion is heard in the distance. RUFÉ starts with an expression of intense excitement.]

MATT

What the devil wus that?

RUFÉ

[Slinks toward the door]

It must ha' been thunder! That's all it wus! It couldn't ha' been nothin' else!

[He slips out and is seen rushing away past the window.]

MATT

[As if to himself]

Sounded to me like blastin'.

ANDY

Mebby it 'us the stopper blowed out o' hell!

MATT

You'll be able to tell more about that a little later when you git thar!

[He glares at ANDY menacingly. JUDE enters from

the kitchen, followed by MEG with a lantern, which she places on the table.]

ANDY

Well, Sis, have you come fer the funeral?

[She turns away from him to conceal her emotion.]

MATT

[To MEG]

You didn't see ner hear nothin' o' Sid?

MEG

No! What happened to him?

MATT

That's what I'm a-tryin' to find out.

MEG

[Looks at ANDY]

Don't *he* know?

MATT

'Course he knows, but he ain't a-goin' to tell us tell he has to!

[MEG looks at ANDY with an expression of dumb hopelessness. He avoids her eyes.]

JUDE

[Comes between MATT and ANDY in a burst of rage]

Why don't you tell what you done with him?

ANDY

Why don't a mewly cow have horns?

MEG

[*Despairingly to MATT*]

Couldn't you git nothin' out of him?

MATT

Nothin' but a passel o' words!

ANDY

[*Apologetically, his eyes on MEG*]

I told you I shot at him an' missed him!

JUDE

If you missed him, whar is he? Why don't he come home? [*He looks at her enigmatically and whistles a jig. She flies into a rage.*] Stop that an' answer me er I'll— [*She seizes MATT's gun as if to take it from him.*]

ANDY

Aw right, Sis, blaze away! But I'd rather you'd let Matt do it. He's a better shot 'n you are. [*She releases the gun.*] As fer Sid—at the rate he 'us a-goin', the last time I seen him he'd ought to be in Chiny by now, if he hain't run hisself to death.

MATT

That's a lie on the face of it!

ANDY

Well then, I killed him an' buried him in the sand.
How's that fer the truth?

[MEG and JUDE turn away with a gesture of revulsion.]

MATT

You'd be closer to it, in my opinion, if you said you
killed him an' throwed him over the cliff into the river!

ANDY

That *would* ha' been less trouble 'n buryin' him if I'd
ha' hit him.

MATT

[*Sarcastically*]

You missed him apurpose, I reckon!

ANDY

No, Matt! Don't git no wrong notions about me!
I missed him because I couldn't hit him!

MATT

It's jist as well you ain't axin' fer mercy, fer all
you're a-goin' to git is jestice—an' plenty of it!

ANDY

You don't have to tell me that. I know you're a-goin' to send me to hell the short way. But I don't want you to make no mistake about one thing: when I go I'll go a-standin' up on my hind legs. I won't go a-crawlin' ner a-whinin' fer mercy. [*Glancing at MEG and JUDE again*] To the best o' my knowledge an' belief, I didn't kill Sid. That's the truth. [*He turns to MATT belligerently*] But I tried my damndest to kill him! An' that's the truth, too!

JUDE

[*Accusingly*]

What 'd you have ag'in' him?

ANDY

[*Enigmatically, after a brief silence*]

He turned his toes out too fur when he walked.

[*MEG and JUDE turn away angrily.*]

MATT

[*Restraining himself with difficulty*]

Is that the best reason you can think of?

ANDY

It's good enough, ain't it?

MATT

[Brings the gun to bear on him]

What do you want us to tell your folks?

ANDY

Jist say I got drunk an' turned my toes *up* too fur!

DAVID

[Enters with the hame-strings and hands one to

MATT]

Here! You tie his feet. [MATT *lays his gun down and begins tying* ANDY's feet to the chair.] I'll 'tend to his arms. [*Stretching one of the hame-strings out as he seizes* ANDY's arms] I reckon these air long enough.

MATT

You've been long enough a-gittin' 'em.

ANDY

Yeh. A little more an' Matt 'ld ha' fixed things so's you wouldn't ha' needed 'em.

MATT

It wouldn't ha' been no mistake, nuther. If he didn't kill Sid, he tried to!

ANDY

Yeh, I told you it wusn't my fault I didn't.
[MATT, *who has finished tying him, grabs his gun, with a growl of rage.*]

DAVID

[*Cuffs* ANDY]

Keep your mouth shet! [To MATT] Go on! They'll be plenty o' time to settle 'ith him when you git back!
[MATT *takes the lantern and goes out, closing the door.*
There is a brief pause. The roar of rushing water is vaguely perceptible in the distance.]

JUDE

[*Listens*]

D' you hear that?

DAVID

[*With a puzzled expression*]

Yeh. It must be another cloud a-comin' up.

JUDE

I never hyeard a cloud roar like that.

DAVID

'Tis quair. Sounds like wind er hail.

MEG

It don't sound like that to me. I dunno what it is.
[RUFÉ *is seen rushing past the window. He flings the*

door open and stands with his hand above his head, pointing toward heaven, his eyes rolling in a fine frenzy of excitement.]

RUFÉ

It's come! It's come!

DAVID

What's come?

RUFÉ

The day o' His Wrath—when the saints an' the sinners shall be parted right an' left! [*He shakes his finger at ANDY*] Brother, will you be able to stan' on that day? That's the question every man here's got to answer—an' every woman, too!

DAVID

You speak as one havin' authority, Rufe.

RUFÉ

I speak what I know!

DAVID

Have you been up to heaven to git the latest news?

RUFÉ

No, I hain't been to heaven yit! But I've been about my Master's business!

DAVID

Well, I hope fer His sake that you 'tended to it better 'n you do to ourn.

RUFÉ

I know I done what He told me! That's all I know—
an' all I want to know—on this earth!

MEG

[*Despairingly*]

I reckon that's enough fer any of us. But I *would* like to know what happened to Sid. I don't feel that I can ever close my eyes in sleep er death tell I find out.

RUFÉ

[*Starts violently*]

If he's in that patch o' woods where Andy left him, it's too late to find him! The river's all over everything! Look!

[*He opens the door and points toward it.*]

MEG

Oh! Is that what's a-makin' the noise?

RUFÉ

Yeh, it's a-sweepin' everything afore it!

[MEG, DAVID, and JUDE go outside and stand gazing
in wonder at the flood.]

ANDY

[Calls excitedly, under his breath]

Rufe! Come here! *[Rufe turns and looks at him.]*
Quick! Take my knife—it's in my right-hand pocket—
an' cut these things! *[Rufe moves toward the door,*
pretending not to hear.] Did you hear what I said?

RUFÉ

Yeh, I hyeard you, Andy.

ANDY

Then hurry up!

RUFÉ

They'd know I done it, Andy!

ANDY

No, they won't! I'll take keer o' you! I've stuck
by you so fur an' hain't told 'em nothin'! An' this may
be your only chance to help me. If the river's over
that patch o' woods Matt 'll be back here in a minute.
Come on! We can go down the cellar stairs an' git
out! They won't be watchin' fer us thar! The outside
cellar door ain't locked, is it?

RUFÉ

I dunno, Andy! But Matt 'ld be shore to ketch me!
I'll do anything in my power, Andy! *[Starts to kneel.]*
I'll pray fer you!

ANDY

[Shouts recklessly, unable to conceal his contempt]

No! You needn't do no prayin' fer me! But they's one little turn you can do!

RUFÉ

[Eagerly]

All right, Andy! I'll do anything you say!

ANDY

Then step down to hell an' tell the devil to have the place good an' hot afore *we* git thar! Fer you're a-goin' with me!

RUFÉ

[Alarmed by ANDY's manner]

You ain't a-goin' to tell 'em what I told you?

ANDY

I'm a-goin' to tell 'em all I know—an' a little bit more—if you don't turn me loose dam' quick!

RUFÉ

But you put yourself on oath, Andy!

ANDY

It's a poor fool 'at can put hisself on oath an' cain't take hisself off!

RUFÉ

Andy, don't say things like that! You may not have much longer to live! An' if you break your oath an' tell 'em, you'll lose all chance o' gittin' to heaven!

ANDY

Heaven be damned! I ain't like you, Rufe! We're both a-goin' to hell, but I'm a-goin' thar by choice!

[MATT enters through the kitchen with the lantern and puts his gun in the rack. MEG, JUDE, and DAVID, seeing him, return from the porch.]

MEG

Couldn't you go no further?

MATT

No, they's been a cloudbust up the river. A wall o' water swep' down past me ten foot high. I jist managed to git out o' the way, when it struck the foot o' the cliffs an' shook 'em like a earthquake. [*He starts toward the kitchen door.*]

MEG

Whar 're you a-goin' now?

MATT

Out to the barn to pen up the cattle afore they git washed away. [*He goes out.*]

JUDE

[*Sobbing*]

Oh! It jist seems like I cain't never stand it to set here—an' the river a-coverin' up everything out thar!

DAVID

Don't fret 'bout the river! The wust it ever does is to come high enough to flood the cellar a little. We're allus safe here.

JUDE

'Tain't us I'm a-thinkin' about!

RUFÉ

It certainly is a quair time—everything a-comin' at once!

ANDY

Yeh, it's Jedgment Day! [*He sings mockingly, his eyes on RUFÉ*]

Are you ready, are you ready fer the comin' o' the Lord?
Are you livin' as he bids you in His Word—in His Word?
Are you walkin' in the light? Is your hope o' heaven bright?
Could you welcome Him to-night? Not by a dam' sight!

RUFÉ

Andy, I want you to stop that sort o' thing!

ANDY

Oh! I 'us afeard I 'us a-trampin' on your toes!

RUFÉ

If it 'us jist mine you 'us a-trampin' on I wouldn't say a word! But it ain't! It's His—up yonder!

ANDY

Ha! ha! I didn't know you 'us a-standin' in His shoes, Rufe!

RUFÉ

You'd a heap better 'umble your proud heart an' quit mockin' an' revilin', Andy! The Good Book says that them that reviles God's handiwork shall die! [*With a convulsive gesture*] An' they shall, too!

ANDY

Yeh, when their time comes—like you an' me an' everybody else.

RUFÉ

[*In a sort of prophetic ecstasy*]

That time has come! This is the beginnin' of a new world! To-morrow 'll be the dawn of a new day!

ANDY

It allus has been!

MEG

[*Provoked beyond endurance*]

That ain't what he means, an' you know it!

RUFÉ

Have patience with him, Meg. We may snatch him like a brand from the burnin' yit. On that day, Andy, the wicked 'll be scattered like chaff afore a mighty wind, an' there 'll be weepin' an' gnashin' o' teeth! Selah!

ANDY

Toot! Toot! Hurrah fer hell!

MEG

You blasphemer! David, why don't you make him shet his mouth?

DAVID

I know the lad too well to think I could break his sperit short o' killin' him. An' I ain't a-goin' to do that tell I find out fer shore, no matter how hard he tries to make me. [*He seats himself in the armchair, his gun across his knee.*] Arter all, Meg, the Lord's will's too big a thing fer any one man to git a strangle hold on it. Rufe's dead certain that God allus sees eye to eye 'ith him on every question. Fer all we know, God hisself may consider *that* more blasphemous 'n what Andy's a-doin'.

RUFÉ

[*His face distorted with malignant rage, shakes his finger at DAVID*]

Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsady!
Fer——

DAVID

[Springs up menacingly]

Woe unto you if you don't quit bawlin' Scripture in my years! *[RUFÉ recoils, taking refuge behind MEG. DAVID seats himself again.]* You don't know what you're a-talkin' about, nohow! If your brains 'us turned to dynamite, they wouldn't be enough of 'em to blow the hat offen your head! *[To ANDY, with a puzzled expression]* Sompen outen the ordinary's happened to him!

ANDY

[His eyes on RUFÉ]

Yeh, an' he don't seem to want to tell about it!

MEG

If you'd ever experienced real religion yourselves, you'd know what's the matter with him!

DAVID

Humph! What makes you think what he's got's real religion?

MEG

By their fruits ye shall know 'em. When I mourned fer Sid you an' Matt didn't bring me no comfort. All you thought of wus vengeance. But I feel comforted

some now [*she pats Rufe's hand protectingly*] an' Rufe done it.

DAVID

Shucks! If comfort in time o' trouble 'us religion, most folks could git more of it outen a bottle o' lick'er 'n they could outen the Bible! [*He looks straight at Rufe as he says this.*]

RUFE

[*Angrily*]

Are you accusin' me o' bein' loaded?

DAVID

Right up to the gills, Rufe. You're drunk on sompen. I dunno whether it's lick'er er religion.

ANDY

What difference does it make? One's jist as dangerous as t'other when it gits into a cracked head.

JUDE

The time 'll come, Andy, when you'll wish you'd prayed 'stid o' scoffin'!

MEG

Yeh, you'll be beggin' Rufe yit fer a drop o' water to cool your tongue in Torment!

RUFÉ

Let 'em revile me! I don't keer! Let 'em persecute me, lie about me, crucify me! I don't keer what they do! Fer verily I say unto you it 'll be better fer Sodom an' Gomorrow on the day o' Jedgment than fer them! [*He looks at ANDY and DAVID significantly.*] An' that day ain't as fur off as it has been! If I 'us a mind to I could tell you things that 'ld curdle your blood an' dry up the marrer in your bones!

MEG

[*Credulously*]

Have you seen a vision, Rufe?

RUFÉ

[*Rolls his eyes mystically toward ANDY*]

What I've seen I've seen! He that hath years to hear let him hear! [*He pauses and gazes about him impressively in the fashion of one "possessed of the Spirit"*] An', lo, there wus a great earthquake! An' the sun become black as sackcloth o' hair an' the moon become as blood! An' the stars o' heaven fell into the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs when she is a-shaken of a mighty wind! An' the heavens parted as a scroll when it is rolled together! An' every mountain an' island were moved out o' their places! An' the kings o' the earth, an' the great men, an' the

rich men, an' the chief captains, an' the mighty men hid theirselves in the dens an' in the rocks o' the mountains; an' said to the rocks an' the mountains, fall on us an' hide us from the face o' Him—— [*He has gradually worked himself up to an emotional singsong like that of the old-fashioned mountain preacher. MEG and JUDE have been swaying rhythmically in tune with his voice. They now join in shouting "Halleluyah!" "Amen!" "Blessed be His Name!" etc. Inspired by this, he continues with increasing fervor, losing all control of himself*—that sitteth on the throne—ah! An' from the wrath o' the Lamb—ah! Fer the gr-r-r-eat day o' His wrath has come—ah——!

ANDY

Whoa, ole hoss, er you'll bust your bellyband! When I tell my religious experience I won't have to stop to suck wind! I'll spit it out quick!

RUFÉ

[*Shakes his finger at ANDY impressively*]

If you'd seen what I've seen an' hyeard what I've hyeard your tongue 'ld cleave to the roof o' your mouth! Woe unto the covenant breaker, fer——

ANDY

No, Rufe! You cain't come that on me! Oath er no oath, my tongue won't cleave wuth a dam! It's loose

at both ends an' it's a-gittin' looser every minute! If you don't spill the truth, I'm a-goin' to! An' that mighty——

RUFÉ

[Frantically, to MEG and JUDE]

Don't listen to him! His mouth is foul 'ith blasphemy!

ANDY

Bretherin an' sisterin, listen!——

RUFÉ

[Begins to sing and drowns ANDY's voice]

"I am bound fer the Promised Land!

[He swings his arms camp-meeting fashion. The women join in and sing with great fervor]

I am bound fer the Promised Land!

Oh, who will come an' go with me?

I am bound fer the Promised Land!"

ANDY

[With mingled admiration and contempt]

I dunno what the devil 'll do 'ith you, Rufe! One thing's certain, they ain't no place in hell hot enough fer you!

MEG

David, I've stood all that I'm a-goin' to! If you won't do nothin' about it, I will!

DAVID

[Rising]

Well, what do you want me to do?

MEG

I don't keer—jist so you git him out o' my sight!

RUFÉ

Whyn't you put him in the cellar?

[He catches ANDY's eye and gives him a significant look. ANDY, who is about to speak, interprets this to mean that RUFÉ has decided to help him escape, and remains silent.]

MEG

We can. That's more like the place whar he'd ought ha' been put in the first place.

DAVID

[Starts untying ANDY]

All right, Meg, I'll 'tend to him. But you'd better git me the key to the outside door, so I can lock him in, case he breaks loose. *[She goes into the kitchen.]*

ANDY

[Looks at RUFÉ significantly]

Well, Rufe, in partin' lemme wish you a long life
[*menacingly*] an' plenty o' time to save yourself from
the hell fire you're so skeered of.

RUFÉ

[With a look of understanding]

Don't you worry about that, Andy. I'll pray fer
you—an' do anything else I can. [*MEG returns from
the kitchen.*]

DAVID

Did you git that key?

MEG

Yeh, here 'tis. [*Vindictively to ANDY*] An' I hope
you lock him in tight!

ANDY

[Sings as DAVID starts toward the cellar with him]

Wonderful love! Oh, wonderful love!

I'll sing of its fullness forever!

I've found the way that leadeth above!

It's the way down into the cellar!

*[He disappears into the cellar with DAVID. MEG goes
ahead of them with the lantern and lights the way.
DAVID closes the door behind him.]*

MEG

[In the cellar]

Lord! The water's risin' in here! That ain't from the river?

DAVID

No, I reckon it's jist a wet-weather spring!

[RUFÉ goes to the door and looks out. He is evidently pleased by what he sees. JUDE, puzzled by his manner, goes to the door and turns back, startled and alarmed.]

JUDE

Look! The river! Did you see it?

RUFÉ

Yeh, I seed it!

JUDE

It's 'most up to the porch steps!

RUFÉ

Well, 'tain't nothin' to git excited about. We're safe. An' Andy's all right, too. It 'ld have to come lots higher afore it could harm him.

[The outside cellar door is heard to slam. JUDE steps out on the porch and looks in the direction of the noise.]

JUDE

[*Calls*]

Whar you a-goin', Meg—out to the barn?

MEG

Yeh.

JUDE

Wait a minute an' I'll help you.

DAVID

No, Jude, you stay under shelter!

[JUDE stands on the porch, gazing out into the darkness. RUFÉ glances at her, then goes over to the cellar door and opens it cautiously, keeping an eye on JUDE.]

RUFÉ

[*Calls softly*]

Andy! Is the water comin' in?

ANDY

[*Guardedly, from the cellar*]

Yeh, it's jist startin'. You'd better hurry an' turn me loose afore they git back!

RUFÉ

I cain't right now. I think I hear Matt comin'. Don't worry 'bout drowndin'. It's jist a little rain water a-seepin' in.

ANDY

[Roars angrily]

That's a lie, you son of a sheep-killin' bitch!

[RUFÉ slams the door to quickly and looks at JUDE to see if she has heard.]

JUDE

[Comes inside]

What 'us that Andy 'us a-hollerin' about?

RUFÉ

Nothin'—jist more cussin'. Don't grieve about him, Jude. Everybody cain't be saved. Some are born fer glory an' some fer shame. Andy seems to be one o' them that 'us born fer shame.

JUDE

[Sinks on the bed and sobs despairingly]

'Tain't Andy I'm a-grievin' about!

RUFÉ

Then it's him—Sid?

JUDE

[Nods brokenly]

Yeh!

RUFÉ

[Closes the outside door, then seats himself on the bed beside her]

Don't grieve 'bout him, Jude. He wusn't born fer glory, neither. You ought to build your hopes on a firmer foundation. They's still treasure in heaven if you'll seek it the right way.

JUDE

[Half sobbing]

That's what I'm a-tryin' to do, Rufe! But all my faith—everything—seems gone now!

RUFÉ

[Moving closer, gradually]

That's a good sign. The darkest hour o' the sperit is allus jist afore dawn. Think, Jude, what a friend we have in Him! Oh, what peace we often forfeit—oh, what needless pain we bear—all because we do not carry everything to Him in prayer!

JUDE

I want to carry it to Him, but I cain't! Seems like I'm froze up inside!

RUFÉ

[Working himself into an emotional singsong again]

I know what's the matter 'ith you, Jude, you ain't

a-trustin' Him! [*He touches her on the shoulder, gradually stealing his arm around her.*] All you got to do is to trust Him—fully trust Him—sweetly trust Him——

JUDE

[*Swaying with the same emotional ecstasy as before*]
I see! Halleluyah!

RUFÉ

That's right! He'll save you! [*She sways with the rhythm of his words, whispering, "Halleluyah" ecstatically.*] You're on the right track. Go right on trustin' Him. He'll comfort you!

JUDE

[*Louder*]

Halleluyah! Bless His name! Halleluyah! Halleluyah!

RUFÉ

That's it! You're a-gittin' right now! Jist imagine you're a-leanin' on the everlastin' arms! [*She lays her head on his shoulder in a state of half consciousness.*] That's the way! He'll comfort you!

[*He has gradually inclined his face toward hers as if fascinated by the singsong of his own voice. Suddenly he kisses her passionately on the lips. She awakes from her stupor and stands gazing at him with an expression of intense surprise.*]

RUFÉ

Don't look at me like that, Jude! It's perfectly all right! [*Dropping into the emotional cadence again*] The Scripture says fer the brethren an' sisteren to greet one another with a holy kiss! That's all it wus, Jude—jist a holy kiss! Go right on trustin' Him—fully trustin'—sweetly trustin'—

JUDE

[*Yielding to her former mood*]
Halleluyah! Halleluyah!

RUFÉ

Let them that's subjec' to the law live by it. Me an' you ain't subjec' to it. We've been redeemed!

JUDE

Glory! Halleluyah!

RUFÉ

[*Slipping his arm around her again*]
It's all right, Jude! 'Tain't no harm fer the Lord's lambs to play together! Go right on trustin'!

JUDE

Glory! Glory! Halleluyah!
[*Some one is heard entering the kitchen. He releases JUDE and stands by the door innocently.*]

MEG

[Enters from the kitchen]

Jude, if you want sompen to do you can come out an' help me move my young turkeys. The water's might' nigh up to the coops! An' David an' Matt are busy wrastlin' 'ith them calves.

JUDE

All right, Meg.

MEG

An' while I'm here David said fer us to fix Andy so he could keep above water if the river keeps on a-comin' up like it is now.

RUFÉ

You an' Jude go ahead. I'll fix Andy.

MEG

Can you do it by yourself 'thout lettin' him git loose?

RUFÉ

Yeh, I can manage him. I won't untie his hands. You go on an' 'tend to your turkeys while you can.

[MEG and JUDE go out taking the lantern. The only light in the room is the glow from the fireplace.]

RUFÉ

[Hesitates, then goes to the cellar door and calls softly]

Andy! *[Getting no reply, he lifts his voice slightly]*
Andy, you ain't drowned, are you?

ANDY

[Roars with suppressed rage]

No, you ring-tailed runt! An' I ain't a-goin' to drown tell I've told 'em the truth about that shootin'! You'd better git your second verse ready! You're a-goin' to need it!

RUFÉ

[Closes the door in a panic of fear, hesitates a moment, then opens it and calls down insinuatingly]

All I wanted, Andy, wus to tell you that if you'll gimme your solemn word not to tell, I might mebbly could help you now!

ANDY

[Defiantly]

Not by a dam' sight! I'm a-goin' to hell a-straddle o' your neck!

[RUFÉ closes the door and backs away, paralyzed with fear. He thinks a moment, then rushes to the gun rack, takes down the shotgun, and goes over to the light of the fire to see if it is loaded. It is, and he

moves toward the cellar door with it. But he stops halfway and comes back as if he had forgotten something.]

RUFE

[Drops on his knees, still holding the gun]

O Lord, Thy will be done, not mine! I won't kill him
lessen You want me to!

[SID enters at the front. His clothes are torn and his face and arms are bruised and smeared with mud. He stops on seeing RUFE and is about to make his presence known, but changes his mind and steps back toward the door.]

RUFE

If it's your will that he shall die too——

SID

[In a deep voice]

Mene, mene, tekell, upharsin!

RUFE

[Not daring to look round]

Is that you, God?

SID

I'm the ghost o' Sid Hunt!

RUFÉ

[Turns fearfully and sees SID]

Who are you a-lookin' fer? *[SID looks straight at him without speaking. RUFÉ, still on his knees, shrinks back in the corner near the bed.]* What are you a-doin' here? You don't need to be a-walkin'!

SID

I've got to ha'nt somebody. You know I didn't die a natchel death.

RUFÉ

All death is natchel—if you look at it right!

SID

An' all ha'ntin's natchel, too, if you look at it right.

RUFÉ

[Shrinks back still further in a paroxysm of fear]
You'd better go back whar you come from!

SID

I've got orders to find out who murdered me.

RUFÉ

Them orders may ha' come from below! You don't have to pay no 'tention to 'em!

SID

They come from above.

RUFÉ

[*Cowering*]

Who is it you got orders to ha'nt?

SID

You!

RUFÉ

[*Recoiling hysterically*]

I didn't do it! I swear on the Bible I didn't!

SID

[*Takes a step toward him*]

If you didn't, who did? I'm a-goin' to ha'nt you till I find out.

RUFÉ

[*Beside himself with fear*]

Then I'll tell you who done it! It 'us Him—up yonder!

SID

God?

RUFÉ

[*Nods his head in speechless awe*]

SID

How d' you know?

RUFÉ

I 'us thar when it happened!

SID

Will you swear that to His face afore the bar o' jedgment?

RUFÉ

I'll swear the truth to anybody's face anywhere any time!

SID

Then come on. [*He beckons to RUFÉ and moves toward the door.*]

RUFÉ

Whar 're you a-goin'?

SID

Up thar whar He is, afore the bar o' jedgment.

RUFÉ

[*Draws back in terror*]

No, Sid! I cain't! I cain't go up thar!

SID

What's the reason you cain't?

RUFÉ

I—I ain't dead yit!

SID

Oh, that's all right. I'll fix you up when we git outside.

RUFÉ

What do you want me to go up thar fer now—like this—when I ain't ready?

SID

Fer a witness ag'inst Him.

RUFÉ

Him—up yonder! You cain't try Him! He's Almighty!

SID

He's almighty tired o' bein' the scapegoat fer folks that do all the meanness they can think of an' call it religion!

RUFÉ

[*Whispers in awed tones*]

Have you seen Him, Sid? [SID *looks at him with Sphinx-like expression.*] Did He say I killed you?

SID

I'll tell you what He said when I git you face to face with Him.

RUFÉ

[Draws back]

No! If He says I done it, that settles it! Let Him be true, though every man a liar! I've allus said that an' I say it still! But what He meant, Sid, wus that I 'us his instrument!

SID

[Grimly]

I see! You done it, but you done it all fer His sake!
[He goes toward him menacingly.]

RUFÉ

[Backs away, shrieking with terror]

Don't kill me! I tell you it 'us the power o' the Lord a-workin' in me!

ANDY

[Shouts from the cellar in the same tone as RUFÉ's]
Pray, brethren, pray! The day is breakin'!

SID

[Stops, surprised]

Is that Andy?

ANDY

[Sings, mockingly]

Roll, Jordan, roll! Roll, Jordan, roll!
You'd orter be in the cellar now
Jist to hear ole Jordan roll!

SID

What's Andy a-doin' in the cellar?

RUFÉ

Your folks put him thar!

SID

What fer?

RUFÉ

They thought mebbe it 'us him that murdered you!

SID

Then you didn't tell 'em it 'us Him up yonder that done it?

RUFÉ

I hain't—yit!

SID

No, an' I reckon you hain't found time to tell 'em 'bout seein' me alive after the shootin', neither?

RUFÉ

Andy meant to kill you, Sid! An' that's the same thing! They wus murder in his heart!

SID

Yeh, an' I'm a-goin' to find out why!

[*He opens the cellar door and disappears inside.*]

RUFÉ

[Rushes forward hysterically]

He won't tell you the truth! They ain't no use ha'ntin' him!

[SID closes the door in his face. He stands trembling a moment, undecided what to do. His eye falls on the bag which he had left by the table in the afternoon. He seizes this and rushes out at the front door. As he reaches the porch and sees that the water is up to the door, he recoils and comes back frantically and throws himself face downward on the bed.]

DAVID

[Enters from the kitchen, speaking to MEG and JUDE, who are just behind him]

I've never seed the water up to the kitchen doorstep afore. At this rate— *[Seeing RUFÉ]* Well, Rufe, you seem to be improvin' each shinin' hour.

[MEG, JUDE, and MATT enter with the two lanterns, which they place on the table.]

RUFÉ

[Rises from the bed, trembling in every limb]

I've seen Sid!

MEG

Sid!

[They all stop and look at him, or an explanation.]

RUFÉ

His ghost! Right here in this room! I jist been talkin' to him!

MEG

Glory be! Then he's walkin'!

JUDE

What 'd he say, Rufe?

RUFÉ

[*Starts*]

I don't mind it all now!

MEG

[*Swaying back and forth in a frenzy of excitement*]

Did he look natchel, Rufe? An' whar'd he go?

DAVID

Shucks, Meg! Don't let him git you all worked up over nothin'! He's lost what little mind he ever had!

MEG

Other folks has seen ghosts an' talked to 'em—folks 'ith jist as good sense as you've got!

DAVID

But only folks that believe in 'em. It's quair they don't come after the ole doubtin' Thomases like me once an' a while

MEG

How'd he appear to you, Rufe?

RUFÉ

I dunno! [*The cellar door opens. RUFÉ recoils in horror*] Here he comes now!

[*ANDY comes out of the cellar amid general consternation.*]

ANDY

[*Starts for RUFÉ*]

Hark, brother, hark! The dead are wakin'!

[*RUFÉ retreats to the farthest corner of the room.*]

MATT

[*Steps in front of ANDY*]

Here! Who turned you loose?

ANDY

Ax the ha'nt o' the man I murdered! [*Calls back into the cellar*] Come on out, old ghost! Nobody ain't a-goin' to hurt you! I left all my silver bullets at home!

SID

[*Enters from the cellar*]

You couldn't hit me if you had 'em, jedgin' by the samples o' your shootin' I've seen.

JUDE

Sid! [*She takes a step toward him and stops.*] Is it you er your ghost?

SID

It's me, all right. [*He holds out his arms toward her*] Here, tetch me an' see!

[*She touches him cautiously, then throws her arms about him.*]

MEG

An' we all thought you 'us dead!
[*She begins to weep hysterically on his shoulder.*]

SID

Now, Mam, don't you an' Jude spill no more water on me! I'm wet enough as 'tis!

MEG

[*Trying to control herself*]
Ain't you hurt nowhar?

SID

No! Andy couldn't hit a barn door!
[*ANDY looks at the floor sheepishly.*]

MEG

[*Flaring up at the thought*]
Well, it wusn't his fault he didn't kill you!

MATT

Yeh, he said so hisself!

[*He glares at ANDY menacingly.*]

SID

[*Goes over to ANDY and places his hand on his shoulder*]

Now, folks, don't go pickin' on Andy. A man o' his marksmanship deserves a lot o' sympathy. [*He glances at RUFÉ.*] Besides, we've been swoppin' experiences down thar in the cellar, an' we've 'bout decided it wusn't edzackly *his* fault that he shot at me.

MATT

[*Takes a step toward RUFÉ*]

Wus Rufe mixed up in that?

ANDY

Yeh, an' that ain't the worst o' his troubles! [*He goes toward RUFÉ, rolling back his sleeves significantly*]

Pray, brother, pray! The day is breaking!

[*With a suppressed cry of terror RUFÉ runs over to MEG for protection.*]

MEG

You keep your hands offen him!

JUDE

Yeh, you needn't go packin' it on Rufe jist to save your own skin!

SID

Now, Jude! Wait a minute! Mebby you'll change your tune when Rufe gits through explainin' jist how I come to git drowneded.

JUDE

Drowneded!

SID

Yeh. This wet ain't all rain. I been in swimmin' sence I seen you last.

MEG

La! What in the world, Sid?

SID

It all happened when that new dam give way.

DAVID

Did that new dam bust?

, SID

It didn't edzackly bust. [*He looks straight at RUFÉ.*] It wus blowed up with dynamite! [*They all turn and look at RUFÉ.*]

MATT

Dynamite!

RUFÉ

[*Appeals to MEG*]

I didn't do it! I swear on a stack o' Bibles I didn't!

MEG

[*Lays her hand on him protectingly*]

'Course you didn't! Don't you worry! They shan't tetch you!

RUFÉ

It 'us Him up yonder! He done it! [*He turns to the men*] I know *you* won't believe me, O ye o' little faith! But if it's the last word I ever utter on earth, He appeared to me in the storm an' I hyeard His voice!

MATT

Shucks!

Aw, hell!

ANDY

} *Together.*

[*DAVID stands staring at RUFÉ.*]

MEG

Don't pay no 'tention to them Pharisees, Rufe! Go right on an' tell what happened!

RUFÉ

It 'us while you 'us all out a-lookin' fer Sid. He come in an' accused me o' aggin' Andy on to shoot him! He cussed an' reviled an' took God's name in vain!

MEG

Sid, you ought to be ashamed o' yourself!

RUFÉ

Then he went out to the dam to telephone an' head off Matt! I knowed the blame 'us all a-goin' to fall on me, an' I knelt thar to pray! [*Pointing*] Right thar in that very spot! [*He looks around him and lowers his voice impressively*] An' all of a sudden God appeared to me in thunder an' lightnin'!——

MEG

[*Clasps her hands in an attitude of worship*]
Glory to——

RUFÉ

[*Continues without pausing*]
An' He spoke to me in a still small voice, but loud aplenty fer me to hear!

JUDE

[*Sways rhythmically*]
Halleluyah! Bless His name!

MEG

What 'd He say?

RUFÉ

[With a convulsive movement of the muscles of his face]

"Gird up your loins," He says, "an' take that box o' dynamite you got out thar in the store an' go forth an' blow up the dam while he's under thar a-telephonin'!"

[MATT and DAVID make an unconscious move toward him and stop, unable to believe their ears. ANDY stands rigid, his eyes fixed grimly on RUFÉ.]

JUDE

[Recoiling with horror]

Oh!

MEG

[Her whole nature transformed to venomous rage]

Then you *did* do it! You tried to murder him!

RUFÉ

[Backs away in terror]

I know it seems quair now, Meg! But He works in a mysterious way! I 'us only——

MEG

[Makes a move toward him with clenched hands]

Take him out o' here an' kill him! If you don't
I'll——

DAVID

[Stopping her]

Now ca'm yourself, Meg!

RUFÉ

I didn't do it, I tell you! I 'us only His instrument!

MATT

[Reaching for his gun]

Yeh, an' so am I!

ANDY

No, Matt! This is my job! Sid's done promised
me I could do it! An' I don't want no weepens—
[holding up his hands]—jist these two instruments!
*[He makes a dash for RUFÉ, who runs into the cellar
and slams the door behind him, holding it from the
inside. ANDY shakes the door, trying to open it.]*

RUFÉ

[Behind the door]

O Lord, if You're ever a-goin' to help me, help me
now! *[He sings frantically, without regard to the
tune]*

I am bound fer the promised land!
I am bound fer the promised land!

ANDY

[Still tugging at the door]

The son of a biscuit eater! He's actially tryin' to play the same trick on God that he played on me!

MATT

What's the matter? Is he holdin' the latch?

ANDY

Yeh. It's your door, but I'll give you ten dollars to let me yank it offen its hinges!

MEG

The door don't make no difference! Go on an' git him!

MATT

Yeh, I'll stand the damage!

DAVID

Now hold on, boys!

MEG

David Hunt, are you a-stickin' up fer that reptile?

DAVID

No, Meg. But I hain't lost my belief in the Lord on Rufe's account. Fact is, I ain't so shore but what I believe in Him more 'n ever.

ANDY

Holy Moses! He's gone hell-bent fer glory, too!

MATT

[*Moves toward the door*]

Well, he ain't a-goin' to stop us by shoutin', "Lord!"

ANDY

Yeh, the Lord had His chance to punish Rufe an' didn't do it!

DAVID

That's jist the p'int. [*ANDY starts to break in the door. DAVID seizes his arm, and holds MATT back also.*] He didn't punish him. But He may do it yit if you give Him a chance. [*Quickly, as they show signs of impatience*] An' arter what's happened here to-night we'd orter be willin' to foller the Lord uphill back'ards 'ith our eyes shet!

ANDY

Arter what's happened here to-night!

DAVID

Edzackly! Take it right straight through from beginnin' to end an' the Lord's been on our side every pop—even to blowin' up that dadburned dam that had never orter been put in!

MATT

That's so! I hadn't thought o' that!

ANDY

Aw! I've seen all I want o' that love-your-enemy truck to-night! I'm a-goin' through that door!

SID

[Who has gone to the door to look at the river, comes toward ANDY]

Well, don't be so brash about it, Andy. I expect Gran'pap's right——

ANDY

Well, I'll be ——! Have you gone crazy, too?

SID

No, but I believe in givin' everybody a chance—includin' the Lord. This is a job I expect He understands better 'n we do. An' we're all in His hands jist now. You see the river ain't through risin' yit.

It 'll be over the top o' this house afore mornin' unless a merricle happens.

[They are all sobered by this and turn toward SID anxiously.]

DAVID

What makes you think that?

SID

While I 'us down thar under the dam a-telephonin', a message come through that all the dams between here an' Asheville had busted an' the river 'us a-sweepin' everything afore it. It 'us twenty-five feet above high-water at Eagle Bluff. An' they said if this new dam didn't hold it 'ld be lots wuss down here afore mornin'.

DAVID

Then we're all a-goin' to have to swim fer our lives!

MEG

Has the water s'rrounded the house?

MATT

Yeh. It's six feet deep twixt here an' the nearest hill!

MEG

Then they ain't nothin' left fer me an' Jude to do but pray, fer we cain't swim!

SID

[Smiles and pats her on the back]

Cheer up, Mam! Things ain't as bad as that yit. As I 'us a-comin' down the river in that turmoil o' water I hooked on to a loose boat and fetched it ashore with me. It's tied out thar now. An' we'd better not lose much time a-gittin' in it, fer that dam'll bust up in sections. An' they's liable to be another wave like the first un.

MEG

Is they room in the boat to take anything with us, 'Sid?

SID

No, nothin' but ourselves.

DAVID

[Takes his rifle from the rack]

Well, I'm a-goin' to take this ole gun if I have to swim!

[MEG begins snatching a few small things from the table and mantel. MATT takes the shotgun.]

SID

[Goes toward the door]

Come on, Andy. I want you to handle a oar.

RUFÉ

[Shouts from the cellar]

You ain't a-goin' to leave me here to drownd? I cain't swim, neither!

ANDY

What makes you think you're a-goin' to drownd? Keep right on trustin' Him up yonder! He'll save you if you've done as much fer Him as you say you have! *[He goes out at the front with SID. RUFÉ is heard praying as MEG, JUDE, MATT, and DAVID finish gathering up their things and follow SID and ANDY.]*

RUFÉ

O God, save me! You can save me if You will! I dunno how, but I know You can! I've got faith in You! I never have doubted You, an' I ain't a-goin' to doubt You now jist because I'm in a tight place! But everybody ain't like me, God! They's lots o' folks that has to have proof! An' if You save the others an' don't save me, like the fool, they're a-goin' to say in their hearts they ain't no God! *[There is a moment's silence. He opens the cellar door and peeps out cautiously. Seeing that the room is empty, he rushes to the front door and looks out, then shrinks back, terrified by what he sees.]* They're right! *[His voice drops to a hoarse whisper.]* They ain't no God!

[*A malignant expression sweeps over his face.*] If they is He hain't got no use fer folks like me! He's fer them that's on top! That's what He is! [*He suddenly rises on his toes, as if impelled by some power outside himself, and hurls defiance toward heaven.*] Damn you, God! [*He gradually collapses, muttering brokenly in a fit of terror.*] Now I've done it! I've committed the unpardonable sin! [*Then he screams hysterically as the curtain falls.*] Help! Help! Come here, everybody, come here!

THE END

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Hughes, Hatcher.

Hell-bent fer heaven

